



## **SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE STUDY ON ACCESSIBILITY**

### **TO POST SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CANADA**

**June 16, 2010**

#### **OVERVIEW**

In 2002 a Human Resources Development Canada study estimated that more than 70 percent of the new jobs created in Canada require some form of post secondary education.<sup>1</sup> Within this context, it is critical to ensure Canada's workforce of tomorrow acquires the knowledge and skills necessary to fill the jobs of the new economy. Canada is also facing a shrinking labour force as the baby boomers are beginning to retire. This submission to the Senate Study on Accessibility to Post Secondary Education in Canada addresses some of the particular challenges in providing post secondary education to the Aboriginal population in Canada.

Evidence clearly indicates First Nation post secondary education is continuing to fall further behind in Canada. Over last 5 years the number of post secondary education First Nation students fell from 27,000 to 23,000. This decrease occurred despite the fact that the First Nation population is one of the fastest growing segments in Canada, growing at rates in some communities that are over three times the national average. Aboriginal youth, men, and women are a huge untapped resource for Canada and steps must quickly be taken to harness this resource.

Aboriginal Education and Training Institutes are key tools in reversing the declining education rate. These Aboriginal Institutions deliver a wide range of accredited postsecondary programs. Through unique delivery models that blend face to face learning, on-line courses and independent study, Aboriginal students are educated in culturally sensitive and supportive environments. As a result, these Aboriginal Institutes have developed excellent track records for delivering real results and educating a growing number of First Nation students.

Despite their excellent results, funding for Aboriginal Institutes is far from sufficient. Aboriginal Institutes receive funding from both federal and provincial governments. However, the institutes do not have access to other funding envelopes that are available to mainstream colleges and universities for such components as operations, programming, research, and capital expansions. Indeed, of the approximately \$10 billion the federal government spends on post secondary education, only \$330 million or 3.3 per cent is allocated to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Post Secondary Education Program (PSEP). Indian Studies Support Program, a component of PSEP, receives an approximate annual allocation of \$22 million which is available to Aboriginal and Educational Institutions to access for the development of culturally appropriate post secondary education programs. Moreover, the allowable increase in funding for PSEP is arbitrarily capped at 2 per cent growth per year. Aboriginal institutes are constantly searching for "other" sources of funding to supplement the funding they receive in order to help develop and deliver programs that meet the evolving learning needs of Aboriginal students.



Increased financial investments by the federal government are critical to building on the successes achieved by Aboriginal Institutes. By making more financial resources available to Aboriginal Institutes for program development, delivery, and capital investments, the federal government would foster the development of courses that are in demand by the First Nation population.

## THE 28 YEAR+ EDUCATION GAP

A Report of the Auditor General of Canada in 2000 first identified the drastic education gap between First Nations and the rest of Canadians. The education gap refers to the proportion of First Nations people living on reserves over age 15 with at least a high school diploma compared with the proportion in the overall Canadian population. In 2004 the Auditor General reexamined this gap, found that it had actually increased slightly and concluded that “The need to close the education gap is even more urgent today given the current and projected demographics in First Nations communities.”<sup>ii</sup> A recent research report commissioned by the Assembly of First Nations confirmed that the postsecondary attainment gap is still growing. This report identified that an additional 65,000 more First Nation students are required in postsecondary education in order to achieve equity with the Canadian population.

Despite this need, there exist many barriers preventing our people from entering post secondary education. These barriers include:

- Low incomes;
- Low education of parents of young people;
- Distance from high schools, colleges and universities;
- Lack of secure and adequate funding; and,
- A desire for students to be educated in more culturally sensitive environments.

As a result of these and other barriers, over the last 5 years, the numbers of post secondary education students fell from 27,000 to 23,000, an unacceptable fact given the increasing First Nations population.

According to the Auditor General, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs “projects that the on-reserve Registered Indian population will grow from about 445,000 in 2003 to about 700,000 by 2021, an estimated growth rate significantly higher than that of the Canadian population.”<sup>iii</sup> This rapidly growing population is a huge untapped resource for the Federal government in the context of the projected need for increased labour now and in the future particularly where there is potential for economic growth.

## SPECIAL ROLE OF ABORIGINAL INSTITUTES

Aboriginal postsecondary education and training institutes play a very important and strategic role in creating an educated and skilled labour force. These institutions develop curriculum to address the current and future human resource needs expressed by Aboriginal communities. Once viewed as an alternative to attending mainstream institutions, Aboriginal institutions are gaining recognition as quality centres of excellence in a variety of program areas such as Aviation, Public Administration, Teacher Education, Trades Training, Police Foundations, Social Work, Paramedics, Native Early Childhood Education, Indigenous Wellness and Addictions Prevention, and Pre-Health Sciences.



The Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario have a proven track record in the delivery of accredited postsecondary education programs through partnerships with college and university partners. For example, there has been a 100% growth in a three year period at OSHKI, an Aboriginal Institute located in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This growth has been seen in both the number of programs that are being delivered by OSHKI and the enrolment of students. OSHKI’s graduation rate is approximately 70%. There has been a tenfold increase in the student body in six years. Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario provide a viable postsecondary education alternative to First Nations and other learners. The Aboriginal Institutes complement the mainstream postsecondary education system.

**TABLE – Growth of Post Secondary Education Programs and Students at Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute**

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i># of PSE Programs</i>	<i># of Students</i> <i>(New &amp; Continuing)</i>	<i>PSE Graduates</i>
<b>2004/2005</b>	1 (certificate)	6	0
<b>2005/2006</b>	1 (diploma)	18	3
<b>2006/2007</b>	1 (certificate)	11	0
<b>2007/2008</b>	2 (diploma)	33	8
<b>2008/2009</b>	4 (diploma)	60	14
<b>2009/2010</b>	6(4 diploma) (2 certificate)	80	29

The graduates of Aboriginal Institutes attribute their success to the culturally relevant programs that are taught, along with the unique blended program delivery models that include classroom setting, online learning and independent studies, that respond to their unique learning needs. Our students are able to earn their credentials in the comfort of their communities (they do not have to relocate to urban settings), and allows students the support of educational sponsoring agencies and community leadership, while courses are designed to recognize and accommodate student’s unique learning needs. Most importantly, graduates strongly feel they succeed because Aboriginal institutes are places they can call their own (unlike mainstream colleges and universities, which unfortunately are still seen by some students as alienating and isolating) with role models that include governance, management, support staff and faculty members. As a result of the unique program delivery models used by the Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario, many students who otherwise would not pursue a higher education are encouraged and inspired to do so. The student retention and graduation rates are also higher at these institutes.

Aboriginal Institutes are contributing to creating the labour force and capacity requirements for First Nations and Canada now and in the future. To improve the employability of First Nations that will contribute to their wellbeing,



families, communities and Canada at large, at minimum there is a moral imperative for the Federal government to support an increase in the number of post-secondary students within the Aboriginal population and at Aboriginal Institutes. Increased financial investments for Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario are critical. The Federal government should also support the capacity of Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario to become certificate, degree and diploma granting institutions and that they become fully sustainable institutions.

## MORE FINANCIAL SUPPORT NEEDED

Aboriginal Institutes receive funding from two primary sources: through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Indian Support Program funding and through the Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities Postsecondary funding.

However, funding is limited and does not allow for institutional growth. As a result, Institutes are forced to be constantly looking for other sources of funding to supplement this support to enable the development and delivery of programs to meet the learning needs of First Nations. At the same time, the Institutes cannot access other funding envelopes available to mainstream colleges and universities for their operations and additional capital. They describe their need as “always scrambling and scrounging for additional resources.”

It is also notable that the Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario do not access ISSP funding for operational expenditures like the First Nations University of Canada which receives \$7 million of the \$22 million national budget which is then divided and disbursed to the regions.

## POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF ADDITIONAL INVESTMENTS

Additional financial investments would allow the Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario to provide more courses, attract and graduate more students and help reduce the education gap. If investments in the Aboriginal Institutes are made, in Ontario, we would see the following major changes by 2026:

- Average earnings of First Nations will increase between 22% and 41% merely as a result of more education; and
- The contribution of First Nations to GDP by that point will increase in proportion, or by \$4.7 billion to \$8.8 billion, an increase of \$4.1 billion.

## CONCLUSION

Ontario’s Aboriginal Institutes are unique vehicles both for Canada and its First Nations, providing necessary skills for First Nations to close the education gap with other Canadians and to help them participate more fully in the Canadian economy.

Aboriginal Institutes have a solid record of performance in managing their role as a source of critically needed education and training for First Nations.



However, the Aboriginal Institutes require additional funding, including, notably, the elimination of the 2 per cent cap on spending increases.

Additional funding is required so that:

- The Aboriginal Institutes can recruit more First Nation students and more effectively identify as many First Nations learners as possible;
- The Aboriginal Institutes can develop more accredited culturally appropriate postsecondary education programs to meet the requirements of the education and training they are undertaking; and
- The Aboriginal Institutes can carry out the necessary information gathering they need and operational support they require in order to carry out their mandate of providing post secondary education and training for their populations; and
- The Aboriginal Institutes in Ontario can build on their capacity to become certificate, degree and diploma granting institutions and become fully sustainable institutions.

Finally, as part of a longer-term solution, the Aboriginal Institutes Consortium recommends that the Government of Canada work in close collaboration with the Consortium to develop a long-term strategic approach to help remediate the disadvantages First Nations post-secondary institutions and learners now face.

## ABOUT THE ABORIGINAL INSTITUTES' CONSORTIUM

The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium was established in 1994 as a forum to address the collective issues impacting its member institutes. The Consortium consists of seven Aboriginal owned and controlled education and training institutions located throughout Ontario. These are:

1. Seven Generations Education Institute
2. First Nations Technical Institute
3. Six Nations Polytechnic Institute
4. Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute
5. Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute
6. Anishnabek Education Institute
7. Iohahiiio Akwesasne Adult Education

Aboriginal institutions have successfully delivered post-secondary programs and services in Ontario since 1985 and currently deliver programs to 4,000 learners per year.



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<sup>i</sup> AG Report on Education, 2004 p.3

<sup>ii</sup> 2004 November Report of the Auditor General of Canada [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_oag\\_200411\\_05\\_e\\_14909.html#ch5hd3c](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200411_05_e_14909.html#ch5hd3c)

<sup>iii</sup> 2004 November Report of the Auditor General of Canada [http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl\\_oag\\_200411\\_05\\_e\\_14909.html#ch5hd3c](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_200411_05_e_14909.html#ch5hd3c)