

Study: Aboriginal languages and selected vitality indicators, 2011

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Over 60 Aboriginal languages are spoken in Canada today. Aboriginal languages are important to the identity of many First Nations people, Inuit and Métis in Canada.

There were 213,490 people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue in the 2011 Census of Population. The Cree languages, Inuktitut and Ojibway were the most frequently reported Aboriginal languages. Dene, Innu/Montagnais and Oji-Cree were other Aboriginal languages with a mother tongue population size of 10,000 or more. About 25 Aboriginal languages were reported as mother tongue by less than 500 people. Some examples are Squamish, Tlingit, Sarcee, Oneida and Gwich'in.

According to the 2011 National Household Survey, about one in six Aboriginal people can conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language. Among the three Aboriginal groups (First Nations people, Métis and Inuit), the proportion reporting an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language was the highest among Inuit. In 2011, 63.7% of Inuit reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, mostly Inuktitut. The proportion was 22.4% among First Nations people and 2.5% among Métis.

More than 52,000 Aboriginal people were able to converse in an Aboriginal language that was different from their mother tongue, suggesting that these individuals acquired an Aboriginal language as a second language. Conversely, about 14,000 Aboriginal people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue have lost their ability to converse in that language.

The assessment of language vitality through the measurement of various factors, such as absolute number of speakers, trends in the population size, proportion of speakers within the total population and second language acquisition, can provide information to better understand the situation of a language in Canada and its potential linguistic continuity. The report illustrates how the 2011 Census of Population and the 2011 National Household Survey can be used to measure some of the factors that provide information related to the vitality of Aboriginal languages.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3901](#) and [5178](#).

The publication *Aboriginal Languages and Selected Vitality Indicators in 2011* ([89-655-X](#)) is now available from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

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