

Indigenous foster children living in private households: Rates and household characteristics

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Among the 94 [Calls to Action](#) in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was the need for more data on Indigenous children in foster care to highlight and address the growing overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system. This overrepresentation is rooted in a history of assimilationist policies which resulted in the forced removal of children from their families and communities and, in turn, their cultures and identities, creating long-term negative impacts. The Census of Population can offer some insight into the important issue of overrepresentation of Indigenous children within the child welfare system. Since 2011, "foster child" has been a response category within the household roster of the census questionnaire.

Using the 2021 Census, the 2016 Census and the 2011 National Household Survey, the study "Indigenous foster children living in private households: Rates and sociodemographic characteristics of foster children and their households" provides counts and rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children aged 14 and younger living in private households, in the provinces and territories and in on and off reserve communities, and examines the sociodemographic characteristics of their households.

Overall, there was an increase in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children among foster children living in private households. The total population share of Indigenous children aged 14 and younger increased from 6.9% of all children in this age range in 2011, to 7.5% in 2016, and to 7.6% in 2021. Over the same period, representation of Indigenous children in foster care increased at a faster pace: from 47.8% of all foster children in 2011, to 51.7% in 2016, and to 53.7% in 2021.

In 2021, the rate of First Nations foster children was 41.8 (per 1,000 First Nations children); among Inuit, it was 33.5 (per 1,000 Inuit children); and among Métis, it was 14.4 (per 1,000 Métis children). The rate of each Indigenous identity group was higher than the rate of non-Indigenous foster children, at 2.3 (per 1,000 non-Indigenous children).

In 2021, Manitoba had the highest rate of Indigenous foster children (61.8 per 1,000 Indigenous children) although the disparity in rates was highest in Alberta, where there was a 28.9 percentage-point difference between rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous foster children. This is because Alberta had the second-highest rate of Indigenous children in foster care combined with the lowest non-Indigenous foster child rate in Canada.

Rates of foster children were two times higher among First Nations children living off reserve (49.9 per 1,000) compared with those living on reserve (24.6 per 1,000), and four times higher among Inuit children living outside Inuit Nunangat (79.1 per 1,000) compared with those living inside Inuit Nunangat (18.8 per 1,000) in 2021.

One way to ensure cultural continuity—an important and well-documented factor in the well-being of Indigenous children—could be through the alignment of cultural identity between foster child and parent. In 2021, just over half of First Nations (50.6%) and Inuit (51.6%) children and nearly two-thirds (63.4%) of Métis children in foster care lived with non-Indigenous foster parents; this proportion was higher in large urban population centres.

Table 1
Rate of children aged 14 and under in foster care (per 1,000 children in the population) in private households by Indigenous identity, Canada, 2011, 2016 and 2021

	First Nations children	Métis children	Inuit children	Non-Indigenous children
	Rate per 1,000			
2011	46.0	17.2	28.3	2.9
2016	43.2	15.1	25.1	2.6
2021	41.8	14.4	33.5	2.3

Note(s): Rates in this chart have been adjusted to account for differences in incompletely enumerated reserves and settlements over time.
Source(s): Census of Population, 2016 and 2021 (3901) and National Household Survey, 2011 (5178).

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Note to readers

Inuit Nunangat—the homeland of Inuit in Canada—comprises four regions: Inuvialuit region (northern Yukon and northwestern part of the Northwest Territories), the territory of Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Quebec) and Nunatsiavut (northern Labrador).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3901.

The publication "Indigenous foster children living in private households: Rates and sociodemographic characteristics of foster children and their households" is now available as part of the *Indigenous Peoples Thematic Series* (41200002).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).