

Suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit (2011-2016): Findings from the 2011 Canadian Census Health and Environment Cohort (CanCHEC)

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Previous research has extensively documented the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, forced placement of Indigenous children in residential schools in the 19th and the 20th centuries, removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities during the "Sixties Scoop," and the forced relocation of communities.

These actions resulted in the breakdown of families, communities, political and economic structures; loss of language, culture and traditions; exposure to abuse; intergenerational transmission of trauma; and marginalization, which have been suggested to be associated with the high rates of suicide.

Previous research has consistently indicated that First Nations people, Métis and Inuit die by suicide at a higher rate than non-Indigenous people. These suicides not only result in significant loss to family, friends and peers—leading to grief and bereavement—but also to the community and society at large, in particular when the deceased is a young person.

However, these national-level figures underestimate the variability in suicide rates. For example, previous reports have shown that suicide rates among First Nations youth in British Columbia range from 0 to 633 per 100,000 people when examined by tribal council area. In fact, the majority of these tribal councils had a zero or very low suicide rate.

Several representatives of Indigenous peoples and governments, communities and government agencies have developed programs, policies or strategies to address the high suicide rate among First Nations people, Inuit and Métis.

This article reports the rates of death by suicide for self-identifying First Nations people, Métis and Inuit from 2011 to 2016, comparing these to rates for non-Indigenous people.

Suicide rates among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit are significantly higher than among the non-Indigenous population

From 2011 to 2016, the suicide rate among First Nations people (24.3 deaths per 100,000 person-years at risk, roughly understood as number of deaths per persons per year) was three times higher than among the non-Indigenous population (8.0 deaths per 100,000 person-years at risk). Among First Nations people living on reserve, the suicide rate was about twice as high as that among those living off reserve.

The suicide rate among self-identifying Métis (14.7 deaths per 100,000 person-years at risk) was approximately twice as high as the rate among non-Indigenous people.

Among Inuit (72.3 deaths per 100,000 person-years at risk), the rate was approximately nine times higher than the non-Indigenous rate (8.1 deaths per 100,000 person-years at risk).

Suicide rates and disparities were highest for youth and young adults (15 to 24 years) among First Nations men and Inuit men and women. Nevertheless, these national-level estimates underestimate the variability in suicide rates at the community level. When examined by First Nations band, just over 60% of bands had a suicide rate of zero.

The higher risk of dying by suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit, compared with non-Indigenous people, is associated with several factors. In this report, the role of socioeconomic characteristics, including household income, labour force status, level of education, marital status and geographic factors such as living on or



off reserve (First Nations people) and community size (Inuit) in risk of death by suicide was examined. These characteristics accounted for a notable percentage of the higher risk of suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit, aged 25 years or older. Among First Nations people, 78% of the higher risk of death by suicide was accounted for by these characteristics, while it was 37% among Métis and 40% among Inuit adults aged 25 years and older.

The findings from this study could contribute further to the understanding of suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit in Canada, particularly the socioeconomic factors associated with higher risk of suicide in these populations and its variability across communities.

Mental wellness resources and crisis help for First Nations people, Métis and Inuit

The following mental wellness resources are available to First Nations people, Métis and Inuit:

Hope for Wellness Help Line

- Toll-free: 1-855-242-3310
- Live chat: www.hopeforwellness.ca

Kamatsiaqtut Help Line

- Toll-free 1-800-265-3333
- In Iqaluit: 1-867-979-3333

Kids Help Phone

- Toll-free 1-800-668-6868
- Text 686868 (no data plan, Internet connection, or app required)
- Live chat: www.kidshelpphone.ca

Indian Residential School Crisis Line

- Toll-free: 1-866-925-4419

Additional resources are available on the Government of Canada website on [suicide prevention](#).

Note to readers

The authors would like to acknowledge the review of preliminary findings and/or draft versions of the report by Indigenous organizations, including Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council, and the National Association of Friendship Centres; as well as federal departments including Indigenous Services Canada, and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. The analysis and the report were greatly strengthened by the suggestions and recommendations provided in the process.

While suicide among Indigenous people has been examined previously, those studies were based on a decades-old cohort or used an area-based geozones approach. Past studies also examined suicide among only one or two Indigenous groups using the same methodology. Finally, previous studies did not examine Indigenous suicide for some geographies such as on and off reserve, rural areas and small, medium and large population centres.

This report attempts to fill in some of these knowledge gaps using the 2011 Canadian Census Health and Environment Cohort. It presents suicide rates among self-identifying First Nations people, Métis, Inuit, and non-Indigenous people in private dwellings in Canada from 2011 to 2016. It also explores the influence of socioeconomic factors in the higher risk of suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit. Rates of death by suicide are presented as number of deaths per 100,000 person-years at risk. This can be roughly understood as number of deaths per persons per year.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5178.

The article "[Suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit \(2011-2016\): Finding from the 2011 Canadian Census Health and Environment Cohort \(CanCHEC\)](#)" is now available.

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