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First Nations people: Selected findings of the 2006 Census



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by Linda Gionet

As part of its contribution to the dissemination of Census findings, *Canadian Social Trends* is highlighting some of the key social trends observed in the 2006 Census.

In this issue, we present adaptations from the following Census analytical documents: *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census* (Catalogue no. 97-558-XWE2006001); *Educational Portrait of Canada, 2006 Census: Findings* (Catalogue no. 97-560-XWE2006001); and *Canada's Changing Labour Force, 2006 Census* (Catalogue no. 97-559-XWE2006001), as well as Census data on income, housing affordability and home ownership.

First Nations people represent a large and diverse population. They number 698,025¹ individuals and comprise 60% of over one million people who identified themselves as an Aboriginal person in the 2006 Census. (See "What you should know about this study" for terms and definitions.)

First Nations people account for 2.2% of the total Canadian population and they are growing at a rapid rate. Between 1996 and 2006, the First Nations population grew by 29%.² This rate was 3.5 times more than the 8% growth rate recorded by the non-Aboriginal population in Canada. Several factors account for the rapid growth, such as high birth rates and an increase in the number of individuals who are now identifying themselves as a First Nations person (North American Indian).³

A large proportion of the population who reported that they were First Nations people also said that they were Registered or Treaty

Indians.⁴ In the 2006 Census, 81% of First Nations people were Registered Indians.

Among First Nations people living off reserve, 68% were Registered Indians while 32% did not have Registered Indian status. Nearly all of First Nations people living on reserve were Registered Indians (98%).

This article highlights where First Nations people live, their age structure, children's living arrangements, the ability to speak an Aboriginal language, postsecondary education, employment and unemployment, income, and housing conditions (including housing affordability and home ownership).

Majority of First Nations people live in Ontario and Western provinces

Together, Ontario and the Western provinces were home to an estimated 577,300 First Nations people, or four-fifths (83%) of all First Nations people in Canada (Table 1).

The 2006 Census enumerated 158,395 First Nations people (23%) in Ontario; 129,580 (19%) in British Columbia; 100,645 (14%) in Manitoba; 97,275 (14%) in Alberta; and 91,400 (13%) in Saskatchewan.

Although a quarter of the First Nations population lived in Ontario, they represented 1.4% of the total population of that province.⁵ In contrast, First Nations people comprised a larger percentage of the total population in regions such as the Northwest Territories (31%), Yukon (21%) and Saskatchewan (10%).

In 2006, 45% of First Nations people lived in urban areas. (Urban areas include large cities, or census metropolitan areas, and smaller urban centres.)

The five census metropolitan areas (CMAs) with the largest number of First Nations people were Winnipeg (25,900), Vancouver (23,515), Edmonton (22,440), Toronto (17,275) and Saskatoon (11,510).

Table 1 Size of the First Nations population, Canada, provinces and territories, 2006

Provinces and territories	Distribution (2006)
	percentage
Canada	100
Newfoundland and Labrador	1.1
Prince Edward Island	0.2
Nova Scotia	2.2
New Brunswick	1.8
Quebec	9.3
Ontario	22.7
Manitoba	14.4
Saskatchewan	13.1
Alberta	13.9
British Columbia	18.6
Yukon Territory	0.9
Northwest Territories	1.8
Nunavut	0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006.

First Nations people are a youthful population

The age structure of the First Nations population in Canada was decidedly young in 2006. The median age of First Nations people was 25 years, while that of the non-Aboriginal population was 40 years. (Median age is the point where exactly one-half of the population is older and the other half is younger.)

About a third of the First Nations population was made up of children under age 15, while only 5% were seniors aged 65 and over. Lower life expectancy, in addition to higher fertility rates, underlies this youthful age structure.⁶

Across Canada, the median age of First Nations people living on reserve (23 years) was lower than for those living off reserve (26 years). Moreover, children under age 15 represented 34% of First Nations people living on reserve and 31% of First Nations people living off reserve.

The median age of 26 years was the same for off-reserve First Nations people with and without Registered Indian status in 2006.

The First Nations population was youngest in Saskatchewan

(median age 20 years) and Manitoba (21 years).⁷ The oldest populations were living in Newfoundland and Labrador (33 years) and Quebec (30 years).

Living arrangements for First Nations children differ from non-Aboriginal population

Compared with the non-Aboriginal population, First Nations children (14 years of age and under) were more likely to live with a lone parent, grandparent or other relative. In 2006, 37% of First Nations children lived with a lone parent, 8% lived with a grandparent or other relative.⁸ This compares with 17% of non-Aboriginal children who lived with a lone parent and less than 1% who lived with a grandparent or other relative.

About a third of First Nations children living on reserve resided with a lone parent in 2006. The percentage was higher for First Nations children living off reserve at 41%. Among those living off reserve, First Nations children with Registered Indian status were more likely than those without Registered Indian status to reside with a lone parent (44% versus 35%).

The likelihood of living with a grandparent or another relative was highest for First Nations children with Registered Indian status living off-reserve. In 2006, 10% of these children lived with relatives other than a parent, compared with 7% of First Nations children living on reserve and 6% of off-reserve First Nations children without Registered Indian status.

Over half of First Nations people living on reserve can speak an Aboriginal language

The census recorded over 60 different languages spoken by First Nations people in Canada. The First Nations languages with the largest number of speakers in 2006 were Cree (87,285), Ojibway (30,255), Oji-Cree (12,435) and Montagnais-Naskapi (11,080).

In both 2001 and 2006, 29% of First Nations people said that they could speak an Aboriginal language well enough to carry on a conversation.

This figure, however, was much higher for First Nations people living on reserve. In 2006, half of the First Nations people living on reserve (51%) could speak in an Aboriginal language compared with 12% of those living off-reserve.

Off-reserve First Nations people with Registered Indian status were more likely than those without Registered Indian status to be able to carry on a conversation in a First Nations language (17% versus 2%).

Two out of five First Nations adults (aged 25 to 64) have a postsecondary education

In 2006, 42% of First Nations people (25 to 64 years old) had completed a postsecondary education compared with 61% of the non-Aboriginal population in this age group (Chart 1). (The term postsecondary education refers to educational attainment above the level of secondary (high school) completion. See "What you should know about this study" for a more detailed explanation of the term postsecondary education.)

Comparing Aboriginal census data over time

Some Indian reserves and settlements did not participate in the census as enumeration was not permitted, or it was interrupted before completion. In 2006, there were 22 incompletely enumerated Indian reserves, compared to 30 in 2001 and 77 in 1996.

Most of the people living on incompletely enumerated Indian reserves and settlements have Registered Indian status. Consequently, the impact of incomplete enumeration will be greatest on data for First Nations people registered under the *Indian Act*.

Only the Indian reserves and settlements that participated in both censuses are included when comparing data for two census years.

Defining the Aboriginal population

There are different ways to identify the Aboriginal population based on four questions asked in the census (Aboriginal identity; member of an Indian Band/First Nation; Registered or Treaty Indian; and ethnic origin, including Aboriginal ancestries) depending on the focus and the requirements of the data user.

For the purposes of this article, two concepts are used: Aboriginal identity population, and Registered or Treaty Indian (See Definitions of terms section below).

Separate data are presented for First Nations people living on and off reserve as well as by Registered Indian status for the off-reserve population.

For more information, see *How Statistics Canada Identifies Aboriginal Peoples*: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-592-x/12-592-x2007001-eng.htm>

Definition of terms

Aboriginal identity population: Aboriginal identity refers to those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuit, and/or those who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian, as defined by the *Indian Act of Canada*, and/or those who reported they were members of an Indian band or First Nation.

Census metropolitan area (CMA): is an area consisting of one or more neighbouring municipalities situated around a major urban core. A census metropolitan area must have a total population of at least 100,000, of which 50,000 or more live in the urban core.

Crowding: more than one person per room. Not counted as rooms are bathrooms, halls, vestibules and rooms used solely for business purposes.

Dwellings in need of major repairs: in the judgement of the respondent, the housing they occupy requires the repair of defective plumbing or electrical wiring, structural repairs to walls, floors or ceilings, etc.

Employed: during the reference week prior to Census Day, persons who had a paid job or were self-employed or worked without pay in a family farm, business or professional practice. Includes those absent from their workplace due to vacation, illness, work disruption or other reason.

Employment rate: The employment rate for a particular group (age, sex, marital status, geographic area, etc.) is the number of persons employed in the week (Sunday to Saturday) prior to Census Day (May 16, 2006), expressed as a percentage of the total population, in that particular group.

Family: a married couple (with or without children of either or both spouses), a couple living common-law (with or without children of either or both partners) or a lone parent of any marital status, with at least one child living in the same dwelling. A couple may be of opposite or same sex. "Children" in a census family includes children living with their grandparent(s) with no parents present.

First Nations people: persons reporting a single response of "North American Indian" to the Aboriginal identity question. Although respondents self-identified as "North American Indian" on the census, the term "First Nations people" is used in this article. Both single and multiple responses to the Aboriginal identity question are possible, however, only the population reporting a single response of "North American Indian" is included.

Housing affordability: the share of household income spent on shelter costs, whereby a threshold of 30% is the upper limit for defining affordable housing, as defined by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Those who spend above the threshold may do so by choice, or they may be at risk of experiencing problems related to housing affordability. The data related to housing affordability does not include households living on reserve or on farms.

Income: refers to the total money income received from various sources during calendar year 2005 by persons 15 years of age and over. For a list of total income sources, please

CST What you should know about this study (continued)

refer to the 2006 Census Dictionary. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/reference/dictionary/pop020a.cfm>

Indian Act: *The Indian Act* sets out certain federal government obligations and regulates the management of Indian reserve lands, Indian moneys and other resources. Please refer to "Registered Indians" below for more information regarding the *Indian Act*.

Knowledge of an Aboriginal language: the respondent is able to conduct a conversation in a given Aboriginal language.

Median age: the point where exactly one-half of the population is older and the other half is younger.

Median income: the point where exactly one-half of income recipients aged 15 years and over has more income and the other half has less income.

On-reserve population: The 'on-reserve' population is defined according to criteria established by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). For a detailed definition, please refer to the 2006 Census Dictionary: <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/reference/dictionary/geo012a.cfm>

Postsecondary education: educational attainment above the level of secondary (high school) completion. This includes apprenticeship or trades certificate; college or CEGEP diploma; university certificate or diploma below bachelor level; university degree at bachelor's degree and above.

Registered or Treaty Indians (Status Indians): Registered Indians are people who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register, an official list maintained

by the federal government. Certain criteria determine who can be registered as a Status Indian. Only Status Indians are recognized as Indians under the *Indian Act*, which defines an Indian as "a person who, pursuant to this Act, is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian." Status Indians are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law.¹

For more information, including the inheritance rules regarding the passing of Registered Indian status from parents to children, see the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website at: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/wf/index_E.html

Unemployed: during the reference week prior to Census Day, persons who did not have paid work or self-employment work and were available for work, and were looking for employment, were on temporary lay-off, or expected to start work within 4 weeks.

Unemployment rate: The unemployment rate for a particular group (age, sex, marital status, geographic area, etc.) is the unemployed in that group, expressed as a percentage of the labour force in that group, in the week (Sunday to Saturday) prior to Census Day (May 16, 2006).

Urban areas: have a population of at least 1,000 and no fewer than 400 persons per square kilometre. They include both census metropolitan areas and urban non-census metropolitan areas.

Note

1. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2004). *Words First: An Evolving Terminology Relating to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*, Catalogue no. QS-6181-010-BB-A1. Ottawa, p. 11.

While about the same share of First Nations and non-Aboriginal people had a trades certificate (12% and 13% respectively), First Nations people were less likely to have a university degree or a college diploma. For example, 7% of First Nations people had a university degree, compared with 23% of non-Aboriginal people; 17% of First Nations people had a college diploma, compared with 20% of non-Aboriginal people.

Among First Nations people living on reserve, 35% had completed a postsecondary education. This was

lower than the figure for off-reserve First Nations people (46%), regardless of Registered Indian Status. While off-reserve First Nations people were more likely to have a university degree or college diploma, the share with a trades certificate was about the same for people living on (13%) and off reserve (14%).

Overall, First Nations women aged 25 to 64 were more likely to have completed a postsecondary education than First Nations men in this age group (44% versus 39%). This remained the case regardless of

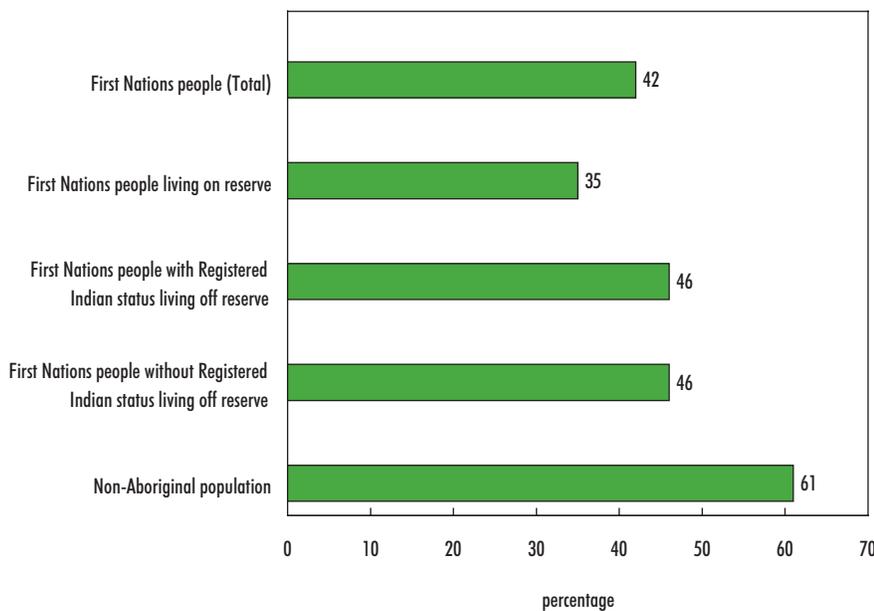
whether they lived on or off reserve or had Registered Indian status.

The gap, however, was the narrowest at 2 percentage points between off-reserve First Nations women and men (47% versus 45%), who were without Registered Indian status.

Employment rates

In 2006, 60.5% of First Nations people of core working age (25 to 54 years) were employed. Although this was lower than the employment rate for the non-Aboriginal population

Chart 1 Percentage who completed postsecondary education among First Nations people aged 25 to 64, by Registered Indian status, living on and off reserve, Canada, 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006.

(81.6%), it represented an increase of about 4 percentage points over 2001 (Chart 2).

Employment rates (the proportion of the population 25 to 54 who are employed) were lower for First Nations people living on reserve. In 2006, First Nations people living on reserve had an employment rate of 51.9% compared to 66.3% off reserve.

Among First Nations people living off reserve, people without Registered Indian status (71.4%) had higher rates of employment than people with Registered Indian status (64.0%).

In 2006, 51.9% of First Nations people living on reserve were employed, compared with 50.0% in 2001. In contrast, employment rates rose considerably for First Nations people living off reserve. For example, 64.0% of off-reserve First Nations people without Registered status were employed in 2006, up from 58.2% five years earlier.

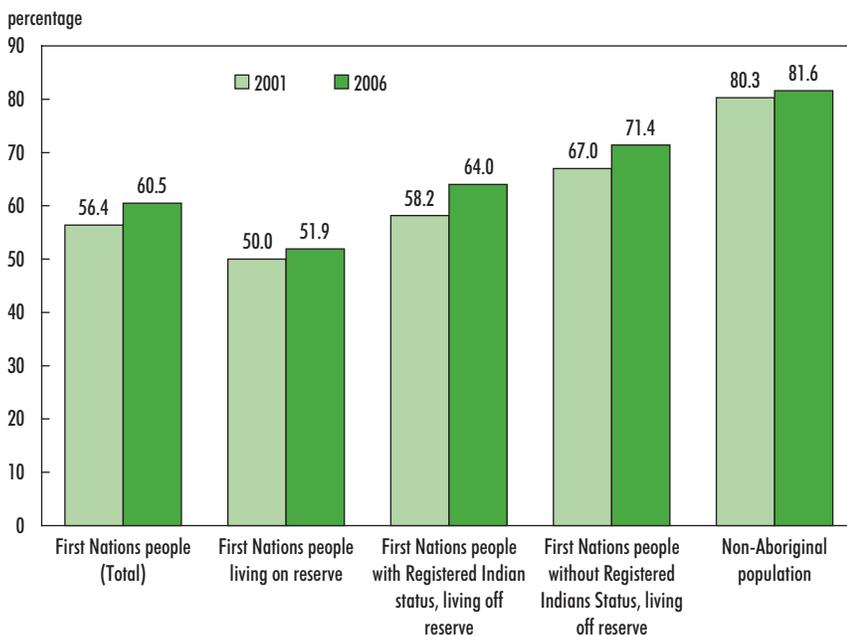
The gap in employment rates between First Nations men and women was widest for people with Registered Indian status living off reserve. Within this group, the employment rates were 70.4% for men and 59.3% for women.

Unemployment rates estimate the proportion of people in the labour force who do not have a job and are looking for work. In 2006, the unemployment rate among First Nations people aged 25 to 54 living on reserve was 23.1% unemployed. By comparison, 12.3% of First Nations people living off reserve and 5.2% of non-Aboriginal people were unemployed.

Among First Nations people living off reserve, unemployment rates for people with Registered Indian status was 13.7% in 2006 compared to 9.4% of people without Registered Indian status.

In terms of the unemployment situation of First Nations men and women, First Nations men living on reserve had an unemployment rate of 27.1% compared to 18.5% for women. Among those living off reserve, First

Chart 2 Employment rates among First Nations people aged 25 to 54, by Registered Indian status, living on and off reserve, Canada, 2001 and 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001 and 2006.

Nations men and women had similar rates of unemployment.

Median income low for First Nations people

In 2005, the median annual income of the First Nations people aged 15 and over in Canada was lower than that of the non-Aboriginal population. (Median income is the point where exactly one-half of income recipients aged 15 years and over has more income and the other half has less income.)

The median income of First Nations people in 2005 was \$14,517, about \$11,000 lower than the figure for the non-Aboriginal population (\$25,955). This gap was similar in 2000; both groups experienced an increase in median income of approximately \$800⁹ between 2000 and 2005.

Overall, First Nations people living on reserve had a lower median income (\$11,224) than those living off reserve (\$17,464). Off-reserve First Nations people with Registered Indian status had a similar median income to people without Registered Indian status (\$16,771 versus \$18,969).

Among those living off reserve, the gap between median incomes of First Nations men and women was wider for people without Registered Indian status. In 2005, the median income of off-reserve First Nations men without Registered Indian status (\$23,221) was \$6,537 higher than that of their female counterparts (\$16,684). The median income of off-reserve First Nations men with Registered status (\$18,732) was \$2,764 higher than that of women (\$15,968).

Housing affordability

The housing affordability indicator refers to the proportion of household income spent on shelter. A commonly-used benchmark is spending 30% or more of before-tax income on rent or mortgage payments plus utilities.¹⁰

In 2006, three in ten off-reserve First Nations people in the provinces lived in households spending 30% or more of their household income on shelter costs.¹¹ This was down

from 35% in 2001, but still higher than the 21% for the non-Aboriginal population. There was little difference in housing affordability between off-reserve First Nations people with and without Registered Indian status (31% and 30% respectively).

Home ownership

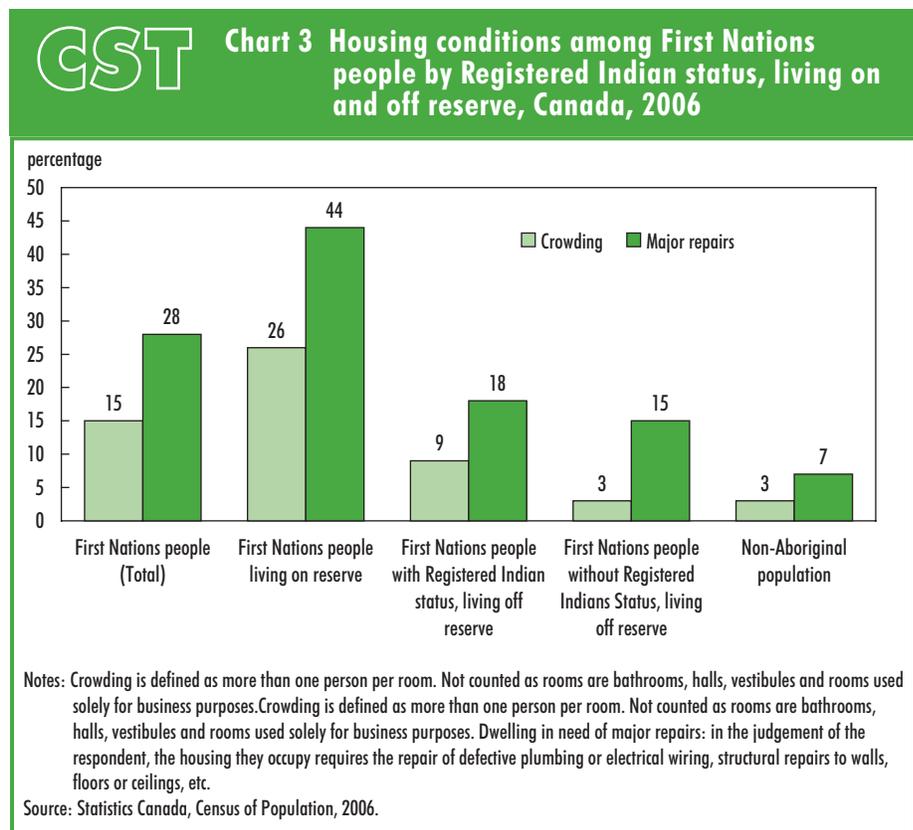
About 45% of First Nations people living off reserve were in dwellings owned by a member of the household, compared with 75% of the non-Aboriginal population.¹² The level of home ownership for the First Nations population, living off reserve, in 2006 was 4 percentage points higher than in 2001.

Off-reserve First Nations people with Registered Indian status had lower home ownership levels (41%) than First Nations people without Registered Indian status (55%).

First Nations people more likely to live in crowded homes and homes needing major repairs

In 2006, First Nations people were five times more likely than non-Aboriginal people to live in crowded homes—15% versus 3%. Nonetheless, First Nations people experienced a decrease in crowding of 5 percentage points since 1996 (Chart 3). (Crowding is defined as more than one person per room. Not counted as rooms are bathrooms, halls, vestibules and rooms used solely for business purposes.)

The highest rate of crowding was reported among First Nations people living on reserve (26%). Overall, this was nearly four times higher than the rate of crowding for First Nations people living off reserve (7%). Off-reserve First Nations people with Registered Indian status were slightly more likely than people without Registered Indian status to live in a crowded home (9% versus 3%).



The quality of one's living conditions is also reflected by the state of repair of one's home. In 2006, 28% of First Nations people lived in homes that needed major repairs versus 7% of the non-Aboriginal population. (The need for major repairs was in the judgement of the respondent.)

Of First Nations people living on reserve, 44% reported having a dwelling in need of major repairs, up from 36% in 1996.

Living off reserve, the need for major repairs was similar for those with or without Registered Indian status (18% versus 15%).

Summary

First Nations people are a young and rapidly growing population that mostly lives in Ontario and the Western provinces. A large proportion of First Nations people reported that they had Registered Indian status. Compared with the non-Aboriginal population, First Nations children were more likely to live with a lone parent, grandparent or other relatives. A higher percentage of First Nations people living on reserve could converse in an Aboriginal language than those living off reserve. Two out of five First Nations adults (aged 25 to 64) have a postsecondary education. Although the employment rate and median income of First Nations adults (aged 25 to 54) were higher for those living off reserve, they remained lower than the non-Aboriginal population. First Nations people living on reserve were more likely to report having crowded homes and those needing major repairs.



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1. Note on rounding: Due to the nature of random rounding, counts may vary slightly between different census products.
2. Only the Indian reserves and settlements that participated in both censuses are included when comparing data for two census years.
3. According to Guimond, "Ethnic mobility is also the principal component to the recent demographic explosion of North American Indian and Métis populations. Failure to consider ethnic mobility in the analysis of Aboriginal populations would preclude proper understanding of the fuzziness of definitions, multiplication of estimates, and recent population growth." Guimond, E. (2003). Fuzzy definitions and population explosion: changing identities of aboriginal groups in Canada. In D. Newhouse and E. Peters (Eds.), *Not strangers in these parts: Urban aboriginal peoples*. Catalogue no. DS-3986. Ottawa: Policy Research Initiative, p.45.
4. See "What you should know about this study" for a definition of the term Registered Indian status.
5. It should be noted that 17 of the 22 incompletely enumerated Indian reserves in 2006 were located in Ontario and in Quebec. Of the remainder, three were in Alberta, one was in Saskatchewan and one in British Columbia.
6. Statistics Canada. (2005). *Projections of the Aboriginal Populations, Canada, Provinces and Territories*, Catalogue no. 91-547-XIE. Ottawa: Minister of Industry, p. 25.
7. In Saskatchewan, First Nations people without Registered Indian status living off reserve (3,985 people) had a median age of 18 years.
8. Less than one percent of First Nations people lived with non-relatives (with no relatives present). This was the case for those living on reserve or off reserve, regardless of Registered Indian status.
9. All dollar amounts from the 2001 Census have been adjusted for inflation and are reported in constant 2005 dollars.
10. According to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), a benchmark for determining housing affordability is when the share of household income spent on shelter costs (rent or mortgage payments plus utilities) is 30% or more of before-tax income. It should be noted that not all households spending 30% or more of incomes on shelter costs are necessarily experiencing housing affordability problems. This is particularly true of households with high incomes. There are also other households who choose to spend more on shelter than on other goods. Nevertheless, the allocation of 30% or more of a household's income to housing expenses provides a useful benchmark for assessing trends in housing affordability.

The relatively high shelter cost to household income ratios for some households may have resulted from the difference in the reference period for shelter cost and household income data. The reference period for shelter cost data (gross rent for tenants, and owner's major payments for owners) is 2006, while household income is reported for the year 2005. As well, for some households, the 2005 household income may represent income for only part of a year.
11. The housing affordability indicator was not used in the territories or for people living on reserve. The unique housing situations in these regions do not easily conform to the indicator's parameters for housing affordability.
12. Home ownership rates were not used for people living on reserve. The unique housing situation on reserve may not be comparable to dwellings off reserve.