

LANGUAGES



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

The On-Going Legacy of Residential Schools

- Before the arrival of European settlers, Indigenous peoples had their own well-established systems of childcare and education that were rooted in the community, the natural environment, and spiritual teachings.
- After the Europeans arrived, colonization began and the introduction of the Indian Act paved the way for the reservation system and residential school system responsible for the "cultural genocide" imposed upon Indigenous peoples in Canada.
- The Canadian policy of assimilating Indigenous peoples came from the belief that their worldviews were inferior or primitive.
- Residential schools were established in 1880 and the school last was closed in 1996. These schools practiced abusive and inhumane discipline on students.¹
- Students were forced to speak English and French at these schools and students caught using their mother tongue were punished.²

Indigenous Languages in Canada

- The majority of languages that are under threat of disappearing are indigenous languages.³
- Languages are not only a method of communication but also an intricate system of knowledge.^{3,4}
- Language is central to identity, cultural preservation, worldviews, spirituality, expression and self-determination.^{3,4}
- Language families include Algonquian languages (Cree, Ojibway, Innu/Montagnais, Oji-Cree, Mi'kmaq, Atikamekw, and Blackfoot), Inuit languages (Inuktitut), Athapaskan languages (Dene, Tlicho, Slavey, and Carrier), Siouan languages (Stoney, Dakota), Salish languages (Shuswap, Halkomelem), Tsimshian languages (Gitksan, Nisga'a), Wakashan languages (Kwakiutl, Nootka), and Iroquoian languages (Mohawk), Michif, Tlingit, Kutenai, and Haida.⁵
- The threat of extinction of indigenous languages is a direct result of colonial assimilation policies.^{3,4}
- The chronic under funding of indigenous language protection and revitalization efforts continues to contribute to the decline of indigenous language speakers.⁶
- Linguistic decline also threatens the loss of traditional knowledge, which is orally passed from generation to generation.⁷

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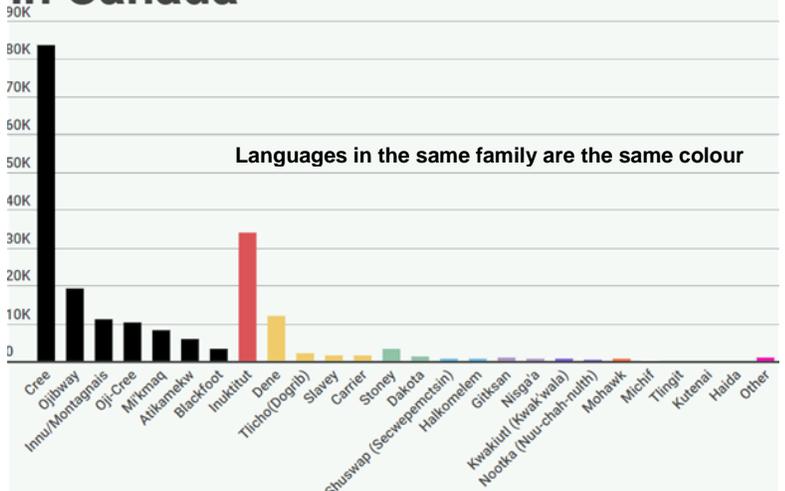
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Indigenous Languages QUICK FACTS

- There are over 60 Indigenous languages in 12 different language families spoken in Canada.⁵
- Only 3 of the 60 languages are expected to survive the next century.⁴
- Indigenous mother tongue speakers are aging.^{4,5}
- Of the most reported indigenous languages, these languages are spoken on a regular basis at home.⁵
- Inuit communities often speak different dialect & use different writing systems, sparking a debate on if a standardized writing system is appropriate for all communities.⁸
- Métis peoples realities as mostly landless people have impacted their identities and access to language.⁹
- Urban communities find language preservation particularly challenging citing lack of priority in urban centers.⁷

Indigenous Language Speakers in Canada



Culturally Relevant Language Programs

- Funding is the largest barrier facing indigenous language revitalization programs.⁶
- Only 5% of First Nations children report learning indigenous languages at school.⁶
- Many communities are reporting that there are no language classes available, no teachers available to teach language classes, and no one to practice language skills with.⁶
- There are language programs in place in most regions of Inuit Nunangat but programs are limited beyond K-3 lessons.⁸
- Websites and YouTube videos provide online spaces to learn Michif.⁹
- Many friendship centres offer language classes, but programs are often cut due to a lack of sustainable funding mechanisms.⁷



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