

Residential Schools and HIV/AIDS: Direct and Intergenerational Impacts.

FACT SHEET



Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network
602-251 Bank Street, Ottawa ON K2P 1X3
Phone: (613) 567-1817
Fax: (613) 567-4652
Toll Free: 1-888-285-2226

About ten years after the last residential school closed in Canada, HIV arrived in Aboriginal communities. It has been increasing ever since at a fast rate.

A study by the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) called: *Canadian Aboriginal People living with HIV/AIDS: Care, Treatment and Support Issues* showed that 17% of the 195 participants had attended residential school. 96% had parents and/or grandparents who attended showing an intergenerational link.

Not all were abused but what many learned from residential schools resulted in low self esteem and negative coping patterns, such as addiction. Injecting drug use now makes up about two-thirds of the new Aboriginal HIV infections, although different for each Aboriginal group.

A second CAAN study: *Addressing Homophobia in Relation to HIV/AIDS in Aboriginal Communities* also found almost 17% of the 86 respondents were also residential school survivors.

Reclaiming Connections is based on a manual developed by the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health in Ottawa. This manual is an effort to promote recovery from residential school traumas and its intergenerational impacts.

These traumas can best be described as “ritualized” abuse that can be linked to many of the underlying causes or high-risk behaviors that can contribute to the HIV/AIDS epidemic within the Aboriginal communities today.

While residential school survivors reacted normally to abnormal situations, the wounds remain deep. They are often lifelong journeys to heal and reclaim what was taken away through federal legislation which created these schools.

Inuit, First Nation and Métis cultures were considered irrelevant, uncivilized and savage. The practical wisdom of their teachings and long-held customs, such as respect, cooperation and sharing were not recognized or understood by Euro-Canadians.

Aboriginal health and social challenges today are believed to be directly and indirectly related to generations of Aboriginal children abused and disconnected from family and community. They were taught to be ashamed of their heritage, language, customs and spiritual beliefs.

Residential schools have now disappeared. Yet, these historical traumas remain and need to be seen as being some of the underlying causes for HIV/AIDS in the Aboriginal community.

For example, Aboriginal women who repeatedly experience physical and sexual violence are identified as vulnerable to high risk behaviors that can lead to HIV infection. Aboriginal women make up almost half of Aboriginal AIDS cases.

One HIV-positive Survivor put it this way: “I came out of residential school pretty screwed up; it caused more problems that would not go away. It caused misguidance and poor judgment that led me to HIV. I can live with the disease, but the mental damage from the residential school is a very serious disease.”

Physical and sexual abuse cannot be healed by the courts. These healing needs remain and must be addressed. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation is nearing its closure and the valuable resources it offered will also end.

Ongoing healing needs must be continued to truly overcome negative impacts. Aboriginal communities have just begun to see the affects of HIV/AIDS. Now is the time to invest in Aboriginal communities so that HIV/AIDS is faced with proper resources – for the children, parents, grandparents and future generations.