

## Lasting Intergenerational Effects

From: <https://healingofthesevengenerations.ca/about/history/>

“The rippling effects of the residential school system have left First Peoples as the most “at-risk” ethnic population in the country, with the highest incidences of unemployment [15], poverty [16], incarceration [17], being victims of murder/assault/or other violence [18], early mortality [19], infant mortality [20], and suicide [21], among many others. The National Health Indicator Profile released by Statistics Canada for 2011-2014 [22] found that First Peoples have higher incidences of arthritis, asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, mood disorders, other chronic conditions, pain that interferes with daily activities, and respiratory problems than non-First Peoples. They are more likely to be overweight or obese, to binge drink, to smoke or be exposed to second-hand smoke; and are less likely to have a regular medical doctor, be satisfied with their lives, or to eat fresh fruit and vegetables on a daily basis. These statistics outpace every other ethnic group, by significant percentages in many cases. These are all indicators of severe crises that can not be easily rectified and will require a comprehensive and holistic approach over a sustained period to make real and lasting change.”

“Researchers have evidence that massive generational trauma, such as the genocidal policies enacted against the First Peoples of Canada, can potentially be passed down epigenetically for over a dozen generations, literally altering the genetic instructions of a family’s DNA for centuries [23]. Studies done on the descendants of Holocaust survivors, for example, show that they frequently have lower levels of the hormone cortisol, which helps your body bounce back after trauma, even through three and four generations. There have been limited studies on the medical and genetic effects of the residential school system on First Peoples, but a recent article in the Canadian Medical Association Journal suggests that chronic hunger and malnutrition, which was central to the experiences of residential school survivors, is a contributing factor to First Peoples having a higher risk for obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic conditions [24]. The authors reference studies that followed famines in China, Russia, and the Netherlands that show chronic hunger and malnutrition led to hormone changes, greater insulin sensitivity, lower insulin levels, chronic diseases, fertility issues (stillbirths), and made individuals more prone to develop Type 2 diabetes, with effects lasting several generations. The residential school legacy then, is not only lasting emotionally, it is physically and potentially even genetically affecting First Peoples’ communities, likely for generations to come.”

### Continued Oppression

Sadly, many policies continue to devastate First Peoples in our country, specifically those in the child welfare and justice systems. The legacy of removing children from their homes, for instance, continues to this day. The *Ontario Incidence Study of*

*Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* from 2013 found that First Peoples children in the Province of Ontario are 130 per cent more likely to be investigated as victims of child abuse or neglect than Caucasian children, 15 per cent more likely to have maltreatment confirmed, and 168 per cent more likely than Caucasians to be taken from their homes and placed into protective care [25]. This is significantly greater than every other ethnic group in the country. In fact, nearly half of the children in protective care in this country are of First Peoples' heritage, despite representing only around 4-10% of the overall population [26]. These numbers reveal the desperate need for more adequate social supports as a preventive measure. Removing children, after the fact, only continues this desperate cycle, creating more adults with low self-esteem and self-confidence, attachment issues, lack of culture, and traumatic long-lasting psychological effects.

First Peoples continue to face oppression in Canada on many fronts, significantly impacting their quality of life and their families' sense of belonging and well-being. The Ontario Human Rights Commission [27] found in 2017 that First Peoples face significant discrimination in policing and justice practices, and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal [28] ruled that the Government of Canada (including Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) racially discriminates against First Peoples children. The United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner has spoken out about the inequitable and inadequate responses of the Government of Canada to the plight of First Peoples [29]. First Peoples are 2.1 times more likely to be unemployed, have a median income that is only 60% of the national average, are 10 times more likely to be incarcerated, 6.1 times more likely to be killed in a homicide, 2.3 times more likely to die in infancy, 2.7 times more likely to drop out of school, and live significantly shorter lives than non-First Peoples [30].

## **What Can Be Done?**

We cannot change the past, but we can change our future. The Healing of the Seven Generations hopes to help reconnect individuals affected by the residential school legacy to their stolen cultures, languages, and traditions. We want to give them a safe space to learn traditional stories, songs, crafts, teachings, and have a community of support that they can turn to when they need it. We want to help them access the supports and healing tools they need to not only survive, but to thrive. Our community is strong, resilient, resourceful, and intelligent and we want to see those skills reach their full potential.”

For more information and the full article, see:

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