INDIGENOUS YOUTH ROOTS

INDIGENOUS YOUTH RECONCILIATION BAROMETER 2024:

Building Connected Futures



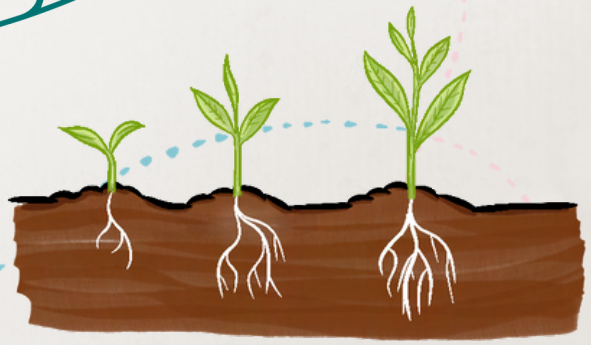


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If you have questions or comments about anything in this report, please contact the authors:

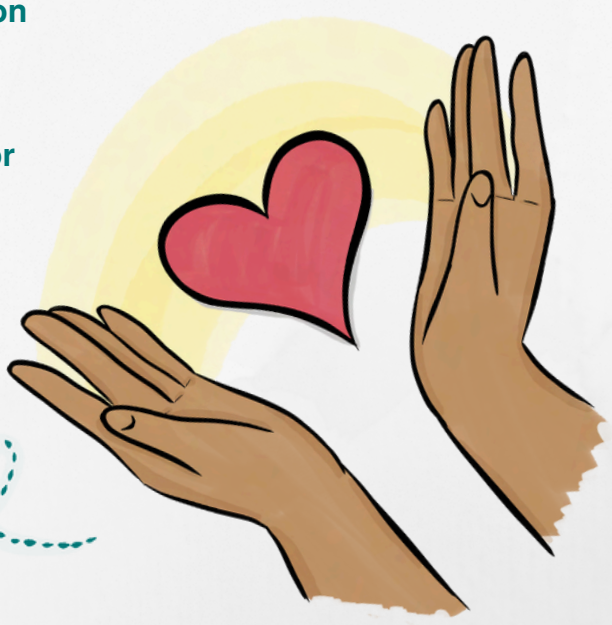
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Thank you to all IYR staff and friends who contributed to the creation of this report, with recognition to those who assisted throughout the entire project, and to those who provided support during the planning, survey development, and/or engagement phases:

Megan D. Nochasak, Indigenous Reseach and Engagement Assistant
Megan Lewis, Director of the Centre for Indigenous Policy and Research
Sasha Simmons, Administrative Coordinator
Melissa Lambert-Tenasco, Indigenous Youth Liaison
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To reach out to the Centre for Indigenous Policy and Research for general inquiries, please contact our departmental email: centre@indigenousyouthroots.ca



Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone that has been a part of this project and made this work possible.

Youth Participants

This project would not have been possible without all the amazing youth that participated. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and wisdom with us, and for the trust you placed in us to present your thoughts in this report. We hope to have honoured your voices and will continue to do so in the years to come through the amplification of this report, as well as through IYR's wider advocacy efforts.

Advisory Circle and Youth Reviewers

Thank you to our Advisory Circle members for guiding this entire project in a good way, and to the Indigenous youth reviewers who ensured that this report truly captured youth voices.

Advisory Circle Members

- Carrington Christmas
- Logan Beauchamp
- Larissa Crawford
- Marrissa Mathews
- Ruth Kaviok
- Eva Jewell

Community Organizations

To support our goal of reaching youth from coast to coast to coast, we partnered with a diverse array of youth, organizations, and community groups. We are deeply grateful for your support in helping us spread the word of this project and capture and empower diverse youth voices.

Elders and Knowledge Keepers

Thank you to all the Elders and Knowledge Keepers that supported the youth in our sharing circles and ensured that we were holding space in a good way.

- Grandmother Isabelle Meawasige
- Charlotte Bernard
- Kahienes Sky
- Diane Strand
- Bonnie Maracle
- Shirley Alphonse

Graphic Recorders

At our in-person sharing circles, we worked with several talented graphic recorders to visually capture the priorities of Indigenous youth. In addition to including their full graphic recordings in the Annexes, excerpts from their graphic recordings have been dispersed throughout the report. Thank you to the graphic recorders we worked with, including:

- Yukon Graphic Recording (Esther Bordet)
- Fuselight Creative (Emma Richardson, Brittany Datchko, Tanya Gadsby)
- Chenise Hache
- Visual Versa (Alina Gutierrez)

Art and Design Attribution

We extend our gratitude to the Indigenous youth artists who dedicated their time and talents to bringing this report to life.

- Bada Jean Griffiths (@bada_jean and www.badajean.com) – At a Glance Cover Page
- Storm Angeconeb (@stormangeconeb) - Personal and Community Empowerment Cover Page
- Marissa Indoe (@marissaindoe and www.marissaindoe.com) - Culture, Language, and Wellness Cover Page
- Shelby Gagnon (@rootveggii)- Education and Meaningful Work Cover Page
- Mya Fiddler (@fiddler.Mya) – Reconciliation and Solidarity Cover Page

Beyond the cover pages, some design assets for this report were completed by Design de Plume, an Indigenous-owned graphic design firm, while others were designed in-house.

Who We Are

Indigenous Youth Roots (IYR)

Founded in 2008, Indigenous Youth Roots (previously Canadian Roots Exchange) is a national Indigenous youth-led non-profit and registered charity (832296602RR0001). We collaborate with communities to provide programs, grants and opportunities that are grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being and designed to strengthen and amplify the voices of Indigenous youth aged 14-29. IYR envisions a future where Indigenous youth are empowered and connected as dynamic leaders in vibrant and thriving communities. Over the last 5 years and across 31 unique programs, IYR has reached 559,785 youth and community members. This includes 7,913 direct program participants, 112 Advisory Circle Members, 115,464 indirect participants and 430,902 digital engagements.

Centering Indigenous youth perspectives, we have 7 deeply held principles that guide us in our work and in the way in which we relate to each other:



For more information about IYR's work and how we apply these principles in support of Indigenous youth, please visit our website.

Centre for Indigenous Policy and Research

This project was conducted by the Centre for Indigenous Policy and Research at Indigenous Youth Roots.

The Centre for Indigenous Policy and Research (The Centre) prioritizes youth policy development and research to support Indigenous youth in advancing their vision of meaningful reconciliation. Through a wide range of programs and initiatives, we create spaces for new leadership and provide tools and resources to empower Indigenous youth to create impactful change.

Within our policy stream, The Centre runs the Indigenous Youth Policy School, Policy Hackathons, the Indigenous Youth Advocacy Week and works to create more spaces for Indigenous youth to lead policy conversations on issues that impact them and their communities.

Our research stream publishes research tying Indigenous youth realities to today's policy conversations and offer small research grants and mentorship support to youth researchers through our Indigenous Youth Research Mentorship Program. We also undertake innovative youth-based research through our large-scale research projects.

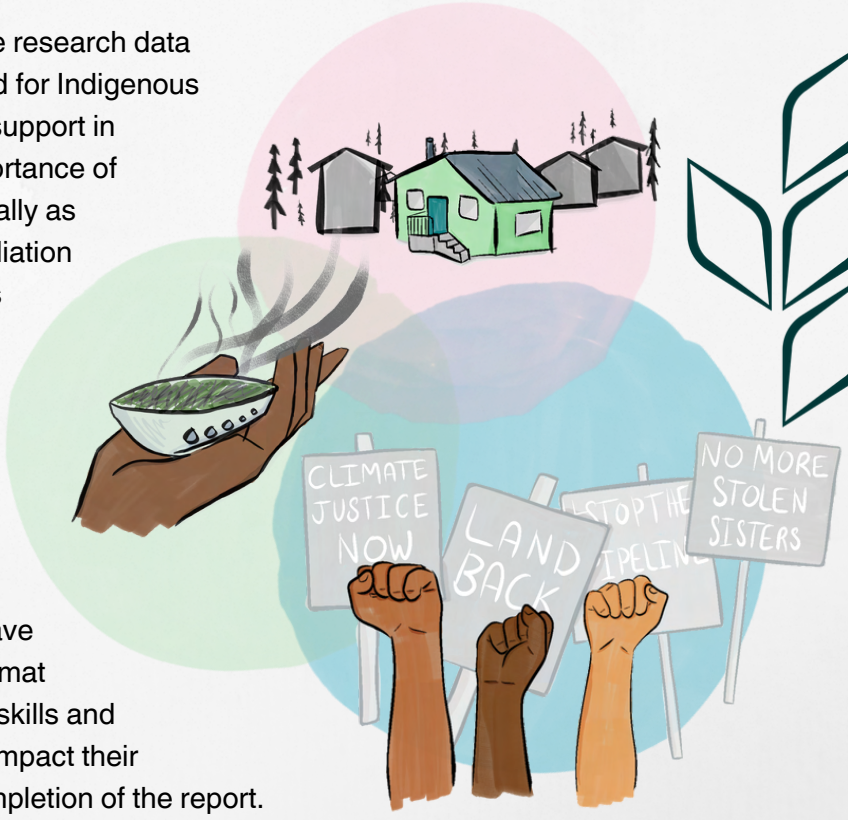


About the Project

Project Summary

Building off the National Youth Reconciliation Barometer (2019), this project focuses on how Indigenous youth (ages 18-29) envision their own futures through themes such as culture, wellness, education, meaningful work, solidarity, and reconciliation. Through these themes, we examined what youth wish for in their futures and how they envision success. We also looked at what barriers need to be addressed to ensure Indigenous youth are empowered and connected as dynamic leaders in vibrant and thriving communities. To ensure a diversity of voices were represented, we engaged with 1,125 youth through in-person and online sharing circles, and an online survey.

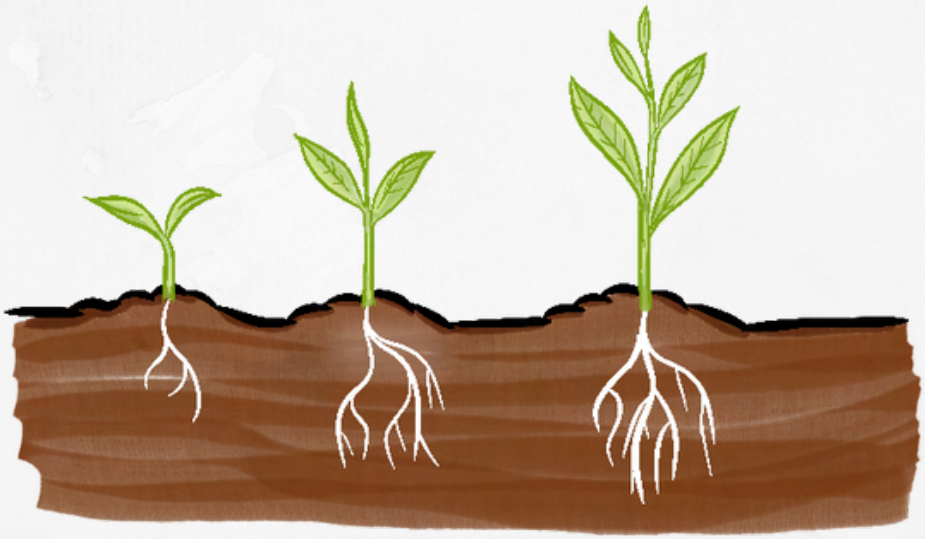
As we know, there is very little large-scale research data that exists that is designed and led by and for Indigenous youth. It is our hope that this project can support in changing that and in highlighting the importance of uplifting youth-engaged research, especially as it relates to exploring concepts of reconciliation and meaningful attachment to Indigenous worldviews, and futures. Approaching research with a focus on empowering youth means youth are not only active participants contributing their insights and perspectives to the project, but that they support, lead, and contribute at multiple stages during and after the completion of the report. The goal is to have youth voices guiding the direction and format of the research, while also fostering their skills and capacity to use it as an advocacy tool to impact their communities' outcomes following the completion of the report.



Project Summary (Continued)

Relatedly, Indigenous youth and their communities have made it clear that the language of reconciliation can't and shouldn't be invoked without tangible action that supports the self-determination and prosperity of Indigenous nations. This project recognizes and approaches reconciliation as something that must be measured next to how and whether Indigenous youth and their communities are empowered to thrive safely and in a self-defined way.

Within this project, it was important for us to see if and how the views of Indigenous youth have changed since the 2019 National Youth Reconciliation Barometer. While there were some key differences between the two projects, which are highlighted further later in the 'Methodologies' section, we ensured that parts of the two projects could be compared to each other when developing the survey and sharing circle questions.



Funding - The Mastercard Foundation

In partnership with



This project was funded through Mastercard Foundation's EleV program.

"The vision for EleV, a vision co-created and confirmed with Indigenous youth and communities, is for Indigenous youth to be living Mino Bimaadiziwin – "a good life" in the Anishinaabe language. Mino Bimaadiziwin is a holistic and Indigenized view of success – not simply employment but a meaningful livelihood, a fulfilling life, a life consistent with one's traditions and values." (Mastercard Foundation)

Data Analysis - The Firelight Group



The Firelight Group is an Indigenous-owned consulting firm that specializes in working with Indigenous communities in research, policy, and other areas. In this project, the Firelight Group completed a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey and sharing circle data.

Methodology

Approach

In approaching engagement with Indigenous youth, we aim to ensure that all relationships we build are reciprocal in nature with the wellbeing and empowerment of Indigenous youth in mind. We always seek to be accountable to the communities we serve by being open and responsive to feedback about the ways we can and should continue to do better. In this project, we ensured that youth were able to have a role in directing the content of our survey and sharing circles by holding an initial guiding session where youth were able to tell us what they want to hear and provide feedback on what questions were asked. Throughout the engagements, we let youth know that we were open to feedback and provided contact information for them to reach out to staff afterwards. Youth who participated in a sharing circle were also invited to be a part of the report review process, where four youth provided their feedback to help ensure we truly captured youth voices.

We also understand cultural safety to be a form of harm reduction and focus on creating spaces that are respectful of community traditions, protocols, and contexts. We strive to ensure that our work is culturally relevant and embedded with anti-oppressive and harm-reduction practices. In relation to research, this includes analyzing and representing information in an accessible way that is grounded in Indigenous and relational ways of knowing, being, and understanding the world. To make this report more accessible, we aimed to present the data in an easy-to-read format, with visual representations where appropriate. We also aimed to use accessible language in the report, survey and sharing circle questions. When needed throughout the engagements, we also provided participants with definitions of terms used to increase accessibility and ensure that most participants were interpreting questions the same.

Approach (Continued)

To protect the knowledge and wisdom of Indigenous youth and their communities, we work to ensure that Indigenous youth are always the primary beneficiaries and owners of their knowledge and information. We are committed to Indigenous data sovereignty as a means of stewarding knowledge in a manner that is consistent with the laws, practices and customs of the Indigenous community or organization in which the information is collected and processed. We hold this as important because when Indigenous people and communities become their own data stewards, they are empowered to make informed decisions for their well-being.

To that end, we ensured the youth knew they could remove themselves and their data from the project at any time and prioritized protecting their anonymity. We also sought to ensure we were open and transparent with participants about why we were collecting their data, how it would be used, and how to get in touch with us to access it.

Beyond this report, we are also committed to seeking and creating further opportunities for the insights presented in this report to be used and discussed in ways that are useful to Indigenous youth and their communities. This could include but is not limited to:

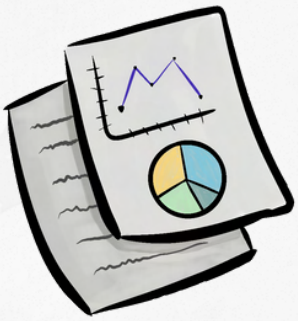
- translating sections of – and the full report where possible – into multiple Indigenous languages and to French, based on guidance from our advisory circle and online polling;
- building an interactive online dashboard where all the data gathered for this report can be accessed and explored;
- hosting information sessions with communities, researchers, and advocates about how the findings can be used to drive advocacy work and program design for Indigenous youth, and
- building the findings of the project into IYR's own policy advocacy framework.

Survey

The online survey was available to Indigenous youth from October 2023 through to February 2024 in English and French. Having a survey as part of this project allowed us to reach youth from coast-to-coast-to-coast and provided a lower barrier option for youth to participate in the project. This also allowed us to complete a comprehensive quantitative analysis of responses, showing clear pieces of data with accompanying response rates.

The survey contained over 50 questions and consisted of multiple question types (e.g., Likert scale, multiple choice, open answer). The survey questions were developed by the Centre for Indigenous Policy and Research at IYR in collaboration with our Advisory Circle and The Firelight Group. The survey was promoted through IYR's social media channels, paid online advertisements, partnerships with other organizations, and through direct outreach to youth and community groups.

The survey received 1,000 responses from Indigenous youth (ages 18-29, living in Canada). To ensure we were engaging with youth in a reciprocal way, each participant received a $50 honorarium. The survey questions were divided into the four themes of this report. The survey questions can be found in Annex B.



1,000

Online Survey Participants

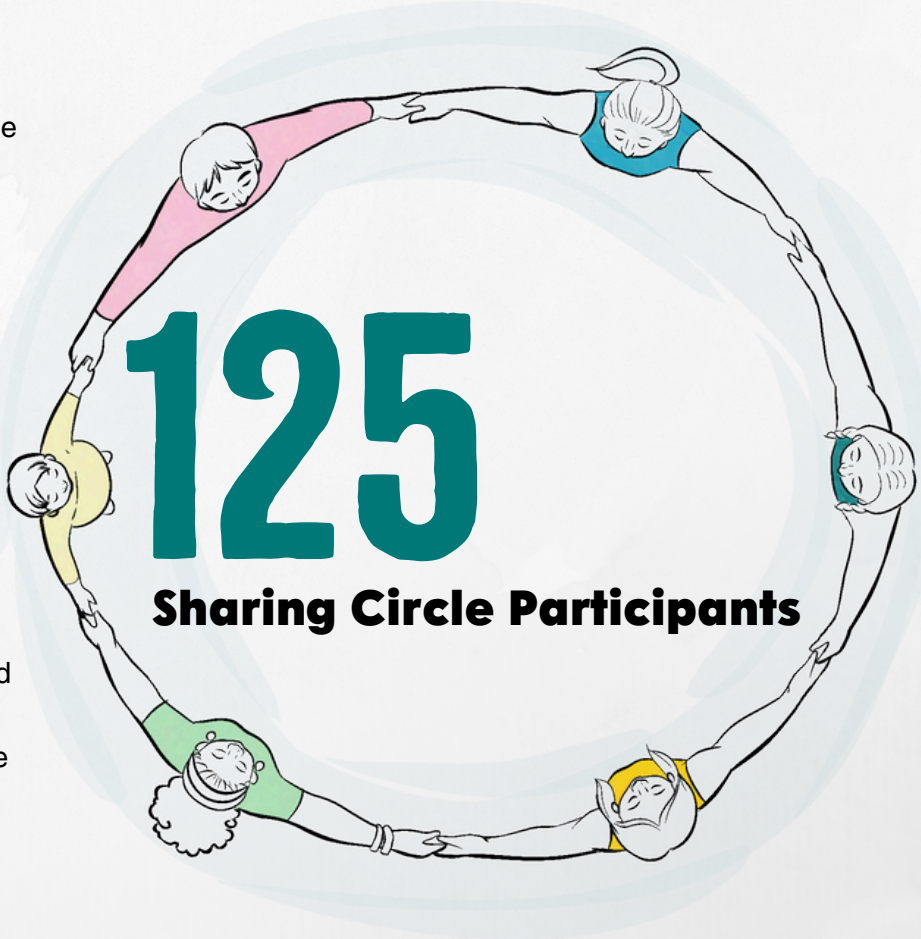
Alongside the survey, a glossary of terms was provided to youth to ensure consistent understanding of terms among those who participated in the survey. The glossary of terms can also be found in Annex C.

Sharing Circles

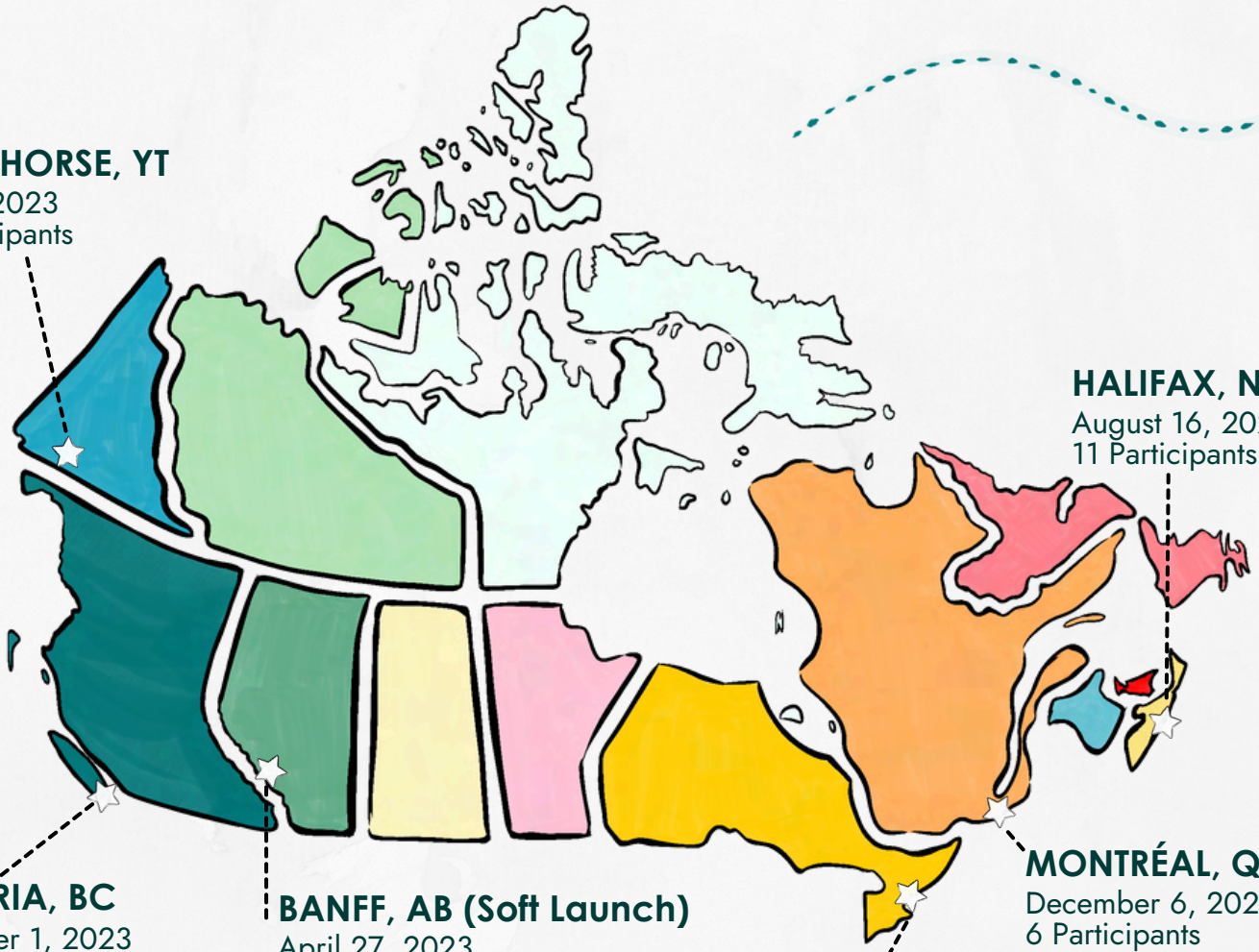
Prior to developing and launching the survey and the core sharing circles, IYR held a preliminary sharing circle at our National Indigenous Youth Gathering (The Gathering) in Banff, Alberta on April 27, 2023. This engagement was a soft launch of our project and was designed to help refine the themes and questions that we would ask going forward. At this sharing circle, we also asked participants what they would like to hear about from other Indigenous youth to help ensure that this project becomes a tool that is of benefit to youth and their communities. As with the survey questions, the core sharing circle questions were developed in collaboration with our Advisory Circle and The Firelight Group. The questions asked at the soft launch engagement and the core sharing circles can be found in Annex A.

The purpose of the sharing circles was to gain an in-depth understanding of how Indigenous youth envision their futures through the themes in this project and provide the important addition of storytelling to complement the survey responses. The sharing circles were also important spaces for Indigenous youth to come together and connect and share with other likeminded youth.

Following the soft launch in Banff, seven sharing circles were held in-person and three were held virtually. Locations for the in-person sharing circles were selected to ensure perspectives of youth from different regions were represented in our research. After the in-person sharing circles were completed, we reviewed the demographics of participants at the sharing circles and participants who had filled out the survey up to that point. Based on the representation gaps revealed at that point, we held three additional online sharing circles to ensure that youth from these areas were represented in our research. The participation counts of each sharing circle can be found in the map below.



IN-PERSON SHARING CIRCLES



WHITEHORSE, YT
July 5, 2023
8 Participants

HALIFAX, NS
August 16, 2023
11 Participants

VICTORIA, BC
November 1, 2023
7 Participants

BANFF, AB (Soft Launch)
April 27, 2023
23 Participants

TORONTO, ON
September 21 & 23, 2023
35 Participants

MONTRÉAL, QC
December 6, 2023
6 Participants

ONLINE SHARING CIRCLES

INUIT NUNANGAT
February 6, 2024
10 Participants

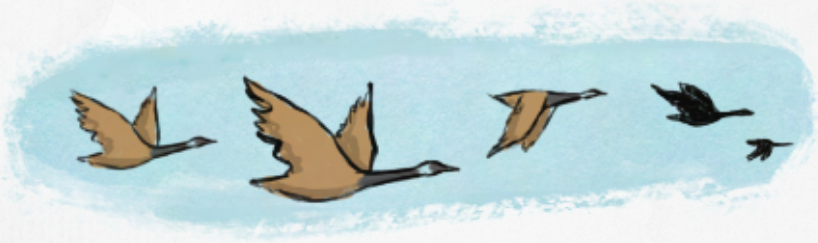
EAST COAST
February 8, 2024
15 Participants

ON-RESERVE
February 13, 2024
10 Participants

Sharing Circles (Continued)

When possible, an Elder was present at each of the sharing circles to open and close the space in a good way and to support youth participants. Stories and opinions shared during the sharing circles were preserved anonymously in our written notes, and there were no audio or video recordings taken. Alongside the written notes, we worked with graphic recorders to capture the themes of these discussions visually. Pieces of these recordings can be found scattered throughout this report, with the full graphic recordings being found in Annex D.

To ensure that we were engaging with youth in a reciprocal way, and to honour their time and knowledge shared, Indigenous youth participants in the sharing circles received a $150 honorarium.



Advisory Circle

This project was guided by an Advisory Circle, consisting of Indigenous youth and subject matter experts. Throughout the project, the Advisory Circle provided feedback and shared their expertise on key components of the project such as our survey and sharing circle questions and our outreach strategy, among many other topics. The Advisory Circle also reviewed and provided feedback on this report, ensuring that we are honoring the information and stories shared with us, and presenting them in an accessible and useful way.

Please see the “Acknowledgements” section above for the names of the Advisory Circle members.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

For each discussion theme, the data was coded to understand 1) how Indigenous youth imagined that particular theme, 2) the barriers or challenges experienced, 3) the support and resources needed to strengthen that theme, and 4) how they felt about that theme, including their visions for the future. Since the sharing circles were not audio or video recorded, we relied on notes for all analysis. All quotes from the sharing circles used in the report were annotated word for word as much as possible, however slight errors are possible. At the online sharing circles, some youth shared their thoughts directly in the chat, and these quotes have been pasted directly.

In the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions from the survey, we coded the answers in the same way as sharing circle data. The quotes pulled from these open-ended questions are direct quotes from the youth, while preserving their anonymity.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

is the analysis of non-numerical data (text or descriptive information) from things like interviews, oral histories, direct observations. In the case of this project, the qualitative data is from sharing circles and open-ended survey questions. A qualitative analysis provides narrative context to the quantitative analysis.

Quantitative Analysis

All survey question responses were analyzed thoroughly, both individually and through cross-tabulation with six demographic categories: Indigenous identity, gender, Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ status, province/territory, geographic type, and disability status. Cross-tabulation analysis helps reveal how responses may vary across different demographics, highlighting potential patterns within the data.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

measures and quantifies information and data with numbers and statistics.

Throughout this project, we have tried to prioritize intersectional analysis and have sought to avoid flattening the identities of youth while still being able to make confident assertions that reflect the responses.

Due to the nature of the data, some demographic categories had to be combined because of having only a few responses. Without this adjustment, these small numbers could have skewed the results, making it seem some responses were more or less common than they actually were. Combining these categories ensures a more accurate representation of opinions across the entire group.

Data Analysis (Continued)

Indigenous Identity was initially recorded with respondents able to select all individual and multiple identities that applied, such as “First Nations,” “Inuit,” “Métis,” “My Indigenous identity is not listed here,” and “Prefer not to say.” This approach, however, resulted in several small sets for various combinations of identities (e.g., Inuit / Métis). Consequently, the Indigenous Identity demographic was compressed to six options to ensure more robust data analysis.

Similarly, Gender was initially recorded with respondents able to select all individual and multiple identities that applied, including “Cisgender woman,” “Cisgender man,” “Transgender woman,” “Transgender man,” “Non-binary,” “Agender,” “Two-Spirit,” “Gender not listed here,” and “Prefer not to say”. Within the array of choices, we compressed this demographic to 11 options to be able to provide an analysis. More information about how the gender categories were collapsed can be found in the Gender Identities section of the Demographic Analysis.

Initially labeled as “Community Type” in the survey, Geographic Type allowed respondents to choose from “Urban,” “Rural,” “On-Reserve,” or “Prefer not to say.” To support the analysis, “Remote” and “Rural” were merged into a single category.

Disability status was initially recorded with respondents selecting “No,” “Unsure,” “Yes,” or “Prefer not to say.” The options of “Unsure” and “Yes” were combined into one, respecting the fact this question specified an official diagnosis was not required and that this was a self-identified response. For context, breakdown of how many participants replied “Unsure” and how many replied “Yes” is also included in the demographic section below.

Combining some demographic categories was not only an effective strategy to manage where there were few responses but was also applied to Likert scale responses to enhance the accessibility and readability of the analysis. For Likert scale questions originally ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree', including ‘Neither’ and ‘Prefer not to say,’ responses were consolidated into broader categories: ‘Strongly agree / Agree’ and ‘Strongly disagree / Disagree.’ This approach reduced the original six response levels into four. In the bar graphs and maps visualizing this data, those answers were reworded to *Yes, Neutral*, and *No,* specifically on the question of what sectors are committed to reconciliation.

Similarly, for questions assessing optimism, where responses ranged from 'Very optimistic' to 'Very pessimistic', including 'Neither' and 'Prefer not to say', the data was simplified into broader categories: ‘Very optimistic / somewhat optimistic’ and ‘Very pessimistic / somewhat pessimistic’ This approach reduced the original six response levels to four, making the data more accessible and easier to interpret across various analyses.

Data Analysis (Continued)

Limitations

While this project helps to fill the gap of research by, for, and/or about Indigenous youth, the lack of existing similar research meant little background information coming into this project, and limited indicators for comparison purposes.

The survey conducted for the Indigenous Youth Reconciliation Barometer 2024 is a non-probability, opt-in survey. This means that the survey respondents (i.e., Indigenous youth) were selected through non-random methods and that participants opted-in to the survey, rather than being selected at random from a demographically representative set of people to participate. As no reliable demographic information exists for Indigenous youth (ages 18-29) living in Canada, we cannot definitively say that the demographics of participants in this project reflect the demographics of all Indigenous youth. Consequently, the results of the survey cannot be generalized to represent the sentiments of all Indigenous youth in Canada.

Despite these limitations, the survey results provide critical insights and a valuable snapshot of the perspectives and experiences of participating Indigenous youth through both surveys and sharing circles. The data collected plays an essential role in initiating conversations and guiding policymaking aimed at reconciliation and empowerment.

Comparison with National Youth Reconciliation Barometer 2019

In contrast to the 2019 'National Youth Reconciliation Barometer', conducted by Indigenous Youth Roots (formerly known as Canadian Roots Exchange) in partnership with Environics, which surveyed both Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, this project is focused solely on Indigenous youth. An additional difference between this Barometer and the 2019 Barometer is that Environics utilized a non-random stratified sampling method. This means that participants were selected non-randomly (they opted-in rather than being selected randomly to participate) and then weighted to ensure the sample accurately reflected the broader population's demographics, based on population statistics (2016 Census). Additionally, the first Barometer included youth aged 16 to 29, while Barometer 2024 surveyed Indigenous youth aged 18 to 29.

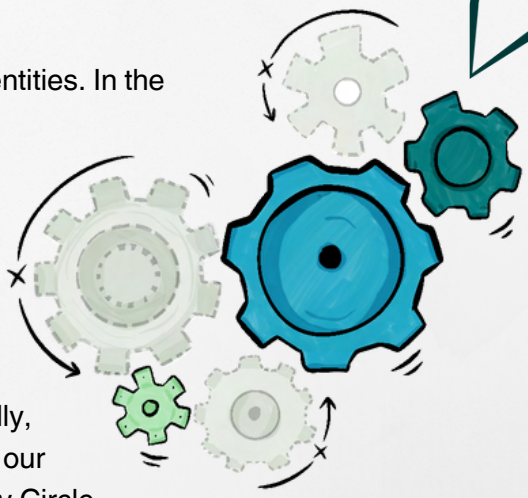
Data Analysis (Continued)

While there are key differences between the National Youth Reconciliation Barometer (2019) and this project which make it so direct comparisons cannot be made across the whole of both projects, we have compared responses between questions that are the same or similar. Through these comparisons, we intend to show how views of Indigenous youth have changed (or not changed) over time and use this to highlight what Indigenous youth need to succeed and feel empowered. When making comparisons, only responses from Indigenous participants in the first project will be used.



Demographic Gaps

As seen in the demographic section below, there were also some demographics where we gathered a lower number of responses. These include youth living in the Northwest Territories and Prince Edward Island, and transgender men and women. Responses from these demographics were included and analyzed throughout the report, but due to the lower number of responses they may not be as representative.



We also saw few participants with multiple Indigenous identities. In the analysis of the data, these responses were condensed into the two or more single identities indicated (i.e., the responses of a youth identifying as both Métis and Inuit will be represented in the separate analysis for each of those identities). While we saw few responses from youth in this demographic, there is no reliable demographic data available to determine if the number of responses we had is representative. Additionally, our engagement rate with Métis youth was roughly half of our 30% goal, which was set in collaboration with our Advisory Circle. Some provinces and territories also saw lower engagement numbers from Métis youth living there, notably Saskatchewan.

The 2024 Barometer: At A Glance



The 2024 Barometer

At A Glance

A follow-up to the 2019 National Reconciliation Barometer, the Indigenous Youth Reconciliation Barometer 2024 focuses on how Indigenous youth (ages 18-29) envision the future for themselves and their communities through the lenses of:

1. **Personal and Community Empowerment**
2. **Culture, Language, and Wellness**
3. **Education and Meaningful Work**
4. **Reconciliation and Solidarity**

Questions were crafted to support in filling critical research gaps regarding Indigenous youth's advocacy priorities, needs, and barriers, and were refined with guidance from youth and an Advisory Circle. In addition to this report, which can be used as a policy and advocacy tool, IYR will continue to produce mini reports, factsheets and sector-specific recommendations and resources that reflect the project's findings.

Over the past year, through our conversations with Indigenous youth and the careful analysis of so much rich data, we gained a deep understanding of what youth want for their futures and what supports they need to realize them in all aspects of their lives. They see their communities and other Indigenous youth maintaining strong, solidarity-filled relationships with other BIPOC communities fostering unity and mutual support. Through all of the themes we explored, it was evident that Indigenous youth envision a future where they lead healthy, balanced lives, and are deeply connected to their culture.

1,125

Total Participants

7 In-Person Sharing Circles / **3** Online Sharing Circles / **1** Online Survey

Quick Stats

68.4%	First Nations Youth
15.8%	Métis Youth
12.4%	Inuit Youth
3.4%	Afro-Indigenous Youth
3.4%	Youth w/ multiple Indigenous identities
69.4%	Urban
18.5%	Remote or Rural
11%	On-Reserve

THEME 1 AT A GLANCE

Personal and Community Empowerment

What makes Indigenous youth feel empowered?

In exploring this question, youth were consistent in expressing the extent to which their personal empowerment is entwined with their community's empowerment. This theme of responsibility and accountability to one's community, to the youth coming up behind them, and to the generations yet to come, is one that surfaced again and again.

When asked in the survey about what makes them feel empowered, Indigenous youth most frequently said they feel empowered when:

81% Envisioning a good future for themselves and their community

78% Being themselves and respected for who they are

78% Being a role model

78% Seeing the impact of a community-led project

72% Practicing their culture



When sharing about a time they felt empowered, youth highlighted stories about participating in and leading ceremonies, being surrounded by and sharing their culture, working with other Indigenous youth and their communities, being accepted for who they are, creating art, finishing their education, and starting their own businesses. Many youth also said they feel inspired when they can be a role model for other Indigenous youth.

> **I feel empowered** when I work with other Indigenous youth. It's empowering to be around like-minded individuals and be part of a community.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

What supports do Indigenous youth need to feel empowered?

When asked about what types of support would best strengthen empowerment for themselves and other Indigenous youth, most agreed that having access to cultural teachings was the most important.

67% Cultural teachings/learnings

54% On the land learning

41% Youth-Elder programs

38% Language learning opportunities

36% Youth council and other opportunities to be a role model

In addition to the supports mentioned, Inuit and Métis youth said they need more mental and physical wellness supports to help them feel empowered. Inuit youth also uniquely identified needing more opportunities to connect with Indigenous youth from other communities. First Nations youth said that they also need more language learning opportunities.

What goals to Indigenous youth have for their futures?

We asked Indigenous youth to identify the most important goals they have for themselves in their lifetime; the most selected responses were:

74% **Living a balanced life (mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically)**

49% **Strengthening my connection to and knowledge of my culture**

48% **Being happy and healthy regardless of where the road takes me**

39% **Being financially self-sufficient**

34% **Contributing to the growth and empowerment of my community**

Sustainability.

Being able to have my own place with my little family. Housing that people could own in the future. Healthy lands and our people could be happy.

-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant

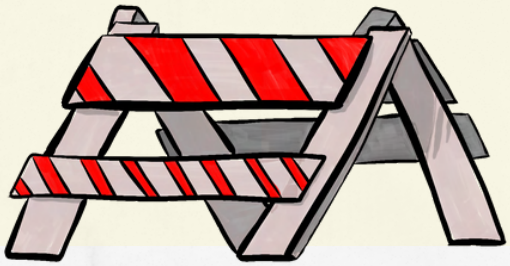


We also asked youth during the sharing circles about the goals they have for their futures. Here, youth talked about their goals of completing secondary or post-secondary education, making a difference in their communities, gaining meaningful employment, and securing safe and affordable housing. Throughout the sharing circles, youth often talked about wanting to live a safe, healthy, and balanced life - and wanting to see their families and communities doing the same.

What barriers are in the way of Indigenous youth achieving their goals?

During the sharing circles, we asked youth what barriers were in the way of achieving their goals. Here, youth identified many barriers facing them relating to health and wellbeing, infrastructure and services (or lack of), community support, and systemic and structural barriers, including but not limited to:

- Systemic racism in all institutions
- Mental health challenges
- Lack of access to housing and clean water
- Lack of access to childcare services
- Lack of access to employment services
- Lack of access to student financial support



What supports do Indigenous youth need to achieve their goals?

In the survey, we asked Indigenous youth what their top five sources of motivation are in setting and achieving their goals. The most selected responses across all Indigenous youth surveyed were:

68% Support from family and friends

68% Believing in myself

60% Having good mentors or role models to guide me

59% Access to services and resources

57% Having financial support

In the sharing circles, youth in urban areas highlighted the need for more safe spaces like Friendship Centres. For many Indigenous youth, Friendship Centres are an important place to access resources and make connections with others. Youth in rural, remote, or On-Reserve areas talked frequently about the need for better infrastructure and services in their communities, such as safe and affordable housing and access to reliable internet connections. For some youth in these areas, the lack of infrastructure and services has made it difficult to access resources that they need not only to work toward their goals, but to feel safe generally.

> **"For myself, I come from a small community** and the closest town is 30 minutes away. Lack of access to employment services off-reserve and poor internet connection On-Reserve are challenges. So, it would be great if we had education or an internet cafe within my community."
>
> *-Online On-Reserve Sharing Circle Participant*

How do Indigenous youth define community and community strengths?

Across our in-person discussions and online survey, youth clearly illustrated just how expansive and generous the concept of community can be. Many youth's definitions of community were rooted in relationships and belonging, while others felt that their sense of community is more tied to specific places. For youth living in urban areas, community is often shaped by the relationships they've built.

Youth also used words like safety, comfort, unity, support, and belonging in articulating their definitions of community. They spoke of the importance of shared land, shared traditions, shared languages, and mutual care.

LANGUAGE NOTE

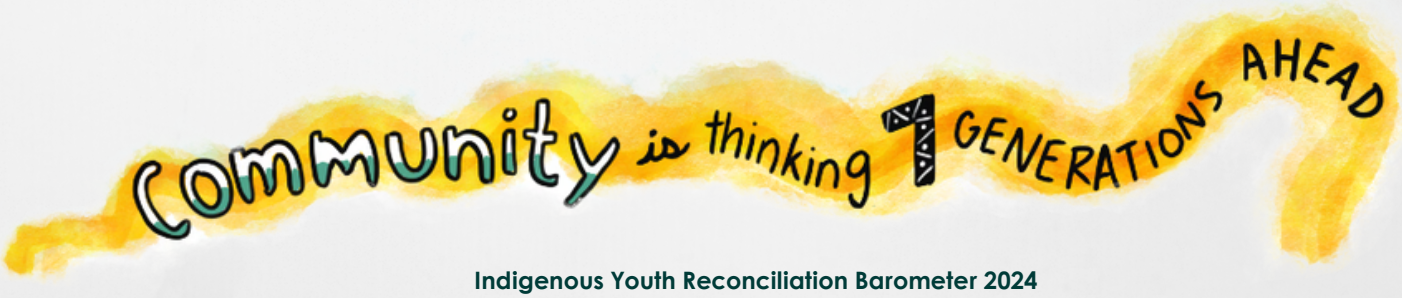
In asking youth these questions about community, we suggested they could speak to their home community or city they are from, the community or city they live in, or any combination of those.

When asked to speak about their community's greatest strengths, youth who filled out the survey gave a wholistic picture of everything that they value most about their community. Some of the most frequently discussed strengths are outlined below.

Top community strengths identified by youth



- Leadership and presence of Elders
- Feelings of mutual care, support, connection, and safety
- Access to regular ceremonies, festivals, celebrations
- Access to land and land-based activities (camping, harvesting, hunting, etc.)
- Language retention and transmission
- Active youth engagement and leadership



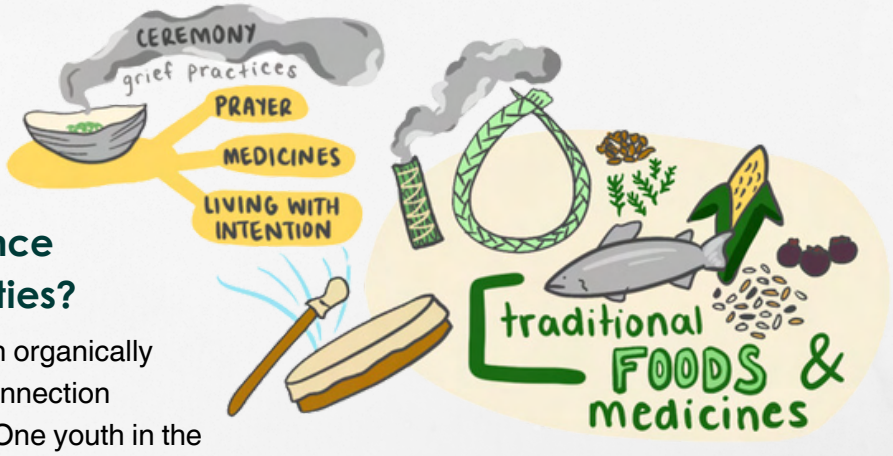
How do Indigenous youth experience community connection?

In exploring what makes them feel connected to their communities, youth stressed the importance of gatherings, whether to celebrate an occasion or to support each other during challenging times. Many youth also said that shared cultural practices and traditions are an important anchor to their sense of community. This could include being able to speak their languages, go out on the land, camp, participate in ceremonies, bead, and dance.

> **"I feel most connected to my community** when I'm participating in ceremony - like right now it's Powwow - or when it's feast, or round dance."
>
> *-Online On-Reserve Sharing Circle Participant*

In the survey, overall, Indigenous youth felt most connected to their communities through participating in community activities and ceremonial practices. The top five most frequently selected activities across all Indigenous youth were:

- **49%** Participating in community and ceremonial activities/practices
- **47%** Being accepted in my community
- **42%** Going out on the land
- **42%** Learning from and spending time with Elders
- **35%** Being able to speak my ancestral language



How do Indigenous youth experience disconnection from their communities?

Discussing connection and barriers to connection organically led youth to share how their experiences of disconnection manifest emotionally, spiritually, and practically. One youth in the Toronto Sharing Circle shared that part of being in community meant carrying out certain duties and responsibilities, but that past traumas can make it hard to carry out those duties, which then creates a sense of disconnection. Other participants indicated that band politics and internal power imbalances made it difficult to feel connected to their home communities. Many youth spoke about the difficulty of finding the balance between connecting with their culture and community while healing from intergenerational trauma.

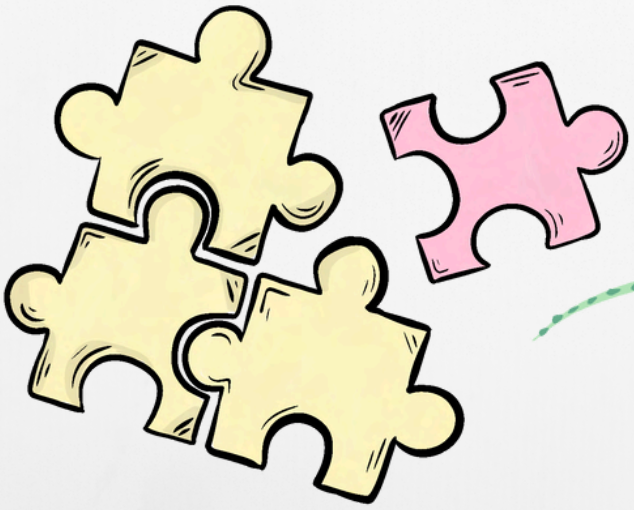
Youth identified that other facets of their identity can sometimes result in disconnection from their Indigenous community practices. One youth in the Montréal Sharing Circle shared their experience of participating in Sweat Lodge as a Two-Spirit person, where they had to wear a skirt and sit with the women, making them less inclined to participate in ceremonies. While they did acknowledge that discrimination against Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ peoples within community is changing, they noted that some communities maintain strict rules and restrictions that can create an unsafe environment for those youth and discourage them from reconnecting to their community.

How do Indigenous youth envision their communities' futures?

In reflecting on what they envision for the future of their communities, youth spoke about building up every aspect of community living, especially:

- Access to all essential services in their communities, including health care, dental care, vision care, and mental health services
- Access to educational facilities
- Access to safe and affordable housing
- Inclusion, acceptance, and care for all Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ community members
- Equal access to quality infrastructure (roads, electricity, transportation, internet)
- Support centres for Elders
- Sport and recreational centres
- Healing from addictions and lateral violence
- Increase of accessible spaces for community members with disabilities
- Food security for Indigenous communities (e.g., having community gardens, better food pricing, hunting, and harvesting)
- More Friendship Centres in urban areas

Across demographics, youth are envisioning their communities to be self-determining, rooted in traditional teachings and systems of governance, with quality infrastructure and services. Notably through all of this, they also envision Elders being cared for, Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth being welcomed into the community fabric, and youth empowered to lead. The overwhelming majority of youth (71%) felt optimistic about these changes.



THEME 2 AT A GLANCE

Culture, Language, and Wellness

How does culture shape Indigenous youth's lives?

In the sharing circles, youth generally spoke about culture as a source of strength, stability, identity, pride, and belonging. Youth spoke about how important practicing cultural activities — like storytelling, hunting, and language — has been in shaping their sense of self. Additionally, youth talked about culture as a means to helping them understand and navigate the world around them.

In the sharing circles and in the survey, many youth spoke about how interwoven culture and community are, while sharing that community is an active, enriching force that enhances individual and collective well-being, and a space that can foster cultural connection.

> **"Culture can shape my values, beliefs and worldview.**
>
> It has influenced the way I see myself and others, and it has impacted my relationships and the way I interact. My culture has influenced the way I dress, the food I eat, the language I speak, I dance, I communicate, and the traditions I follow."
>
> *-Survey Participant*

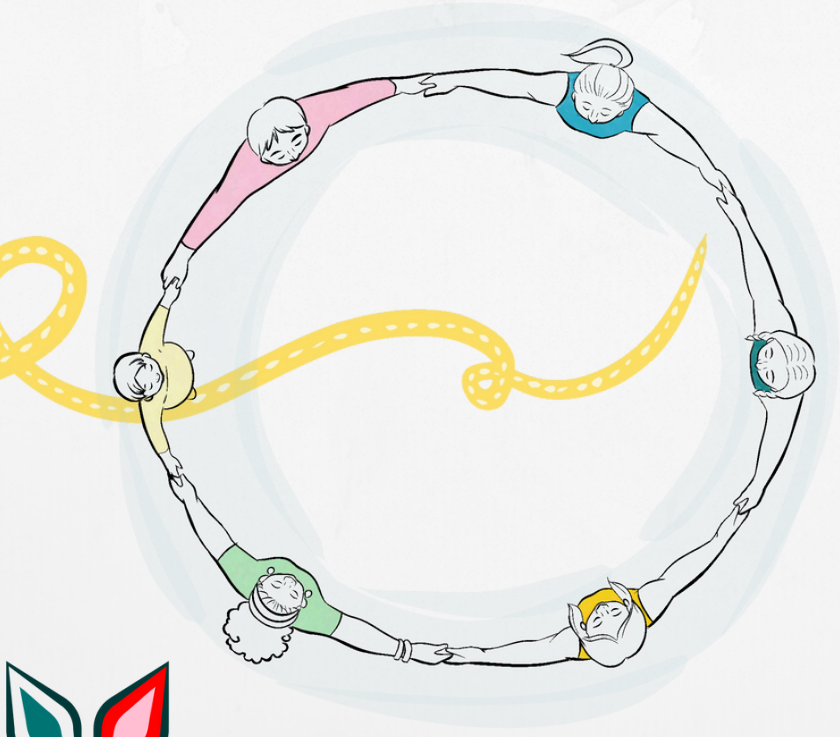
On a collective level, survey respondents also talked about culture and cultural practices as a kind of glue binding their families and communities together. On an individual level, culturally connected individuals spoke about how their connection guided their choices on a range of scales, including career and diet choices, where to live, how to maintain relationships of all kinds, and what it means to live well.

> **Culture has influenced my life a lot.**
> Starting from the artistic expressions, cultural traditions, food, how I relate with people. In general, Culture has shaped my life positively.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

How do Indigenous youth connect to their culture?

In the survey, youth reported feeling most connected to their cultures when spending time in their communities. The five activities outlined below, in different orders, constituted the top five activities that made youth feel connected to their cultures across most demographics. Notably, Inuit youth also included singing, dancing, and/or drumming in their top five and harvesting in their top three.

Top 5 means of connecting to culture overall:



67% Spending time in my community

62% Access to Elders and cultural supports

60% Receiving and engaging with teachings

58% Participating in ceremonies

53% Harvesting, including hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering plants and medicines

Top 3 means of connecting to culture by Indigenous Identity:

FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

65% Spending time in my community

60% Access to Elders and cultural supports

59% Receiving and engaging with teachings





INUIT YOUTH

75% Spending time in my community

66% Access to Elders and cultural supports

64% Harvesting, including hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering plants and medicines

MÉTIS YOUTH

69% Receiving and engaging with teachings

68% Spending time in my community

66% Access to Elders and cultural supports

See full report for more breakdowns!

How do Indigenous youth experience cultural disconnection and barriers to connection?

Across all survey participants, not knowing where to start/who to go to was identified as the top barrier that Indigenous youth face when wanting to connect to their culture. The five most frequently identified barriers across all youth surveyed were:

80% Not knowing where to start or who to go to

70% Not enough time, energy or too many other responsibilities

70% Financial barriers and the cost of living

62% Mental health

54% Lack of programming

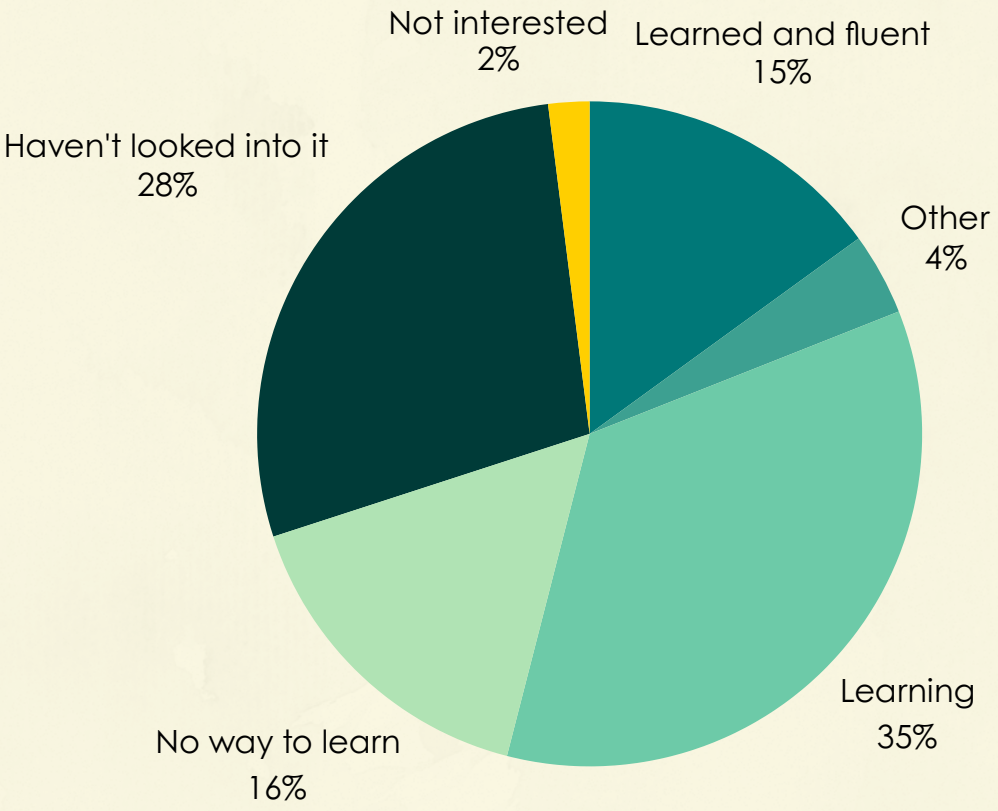
In the sharing circles, Indigenous youth talked about feeling and being disconnected from their culture when they were growing up for a range of reasons that include (but are not limited to) violent colonial interventions like the Indian Residential School System, the Sixties Scoop, attending the Western educational system entrenched in racist ideology, and intergenerational trauma. Often, the cultural disconnection youth reflected on in both the survey and sharing circles is directly tied to a sense of shame for not feeling like they know enough or are enough to belong.

> **As a kid, I felt disconnected from both my Black and Indigenous culture,** but as I grew up school and family helped me grow a connection to my Indigenous roots. I still feel like sometimes I am not Indigenous or Black enough, but getting to know others within my community has shown me that I am not alone in feeling that way and that I don't have to feel that way. I was lucky to have access to such amazing cultural Indigenous support throughout high school and university. Also, being Indigenous and Black has shaped my research and career goals, with me hoping to help destigmatize mental health issues within my community.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

Importantly, this sense of disconnection, shame, and isolation was frequently raised by Indigenous youth who identify as mixed-race, and from those who were raised outside of their community. Many youth also spoke to how the lightness or darkness of their skin directly impacted their sense of belonging to any of their communities. Generally, youth reported that the journey to reconnect to culture can be challenging but filled with the potential to be life-changing and life-affirming.

What experiences have Indigenous youth had with learning their languages?

On language learning, most Indigenous youth said they either know or are in the process of learning their languages or have an interest in learning. Only 2% of Indigenous youth surveyed said they are not interested in learning their language, with an additional 4% having selected “other” as a response.



Youth often cited things like online courses, language learning applications, and social media as helpful tools when sharing what has been helpful to them in learning their languages. Many youth also said they have learned from fluent family members and speakers in their communities. In discussing this, some also shared about the importance of language revitalization, being able to communicate with Elders, and wanting to honour their ancestors.

> **Speaking my language** is a way of honouring my ancestors and preserving our heritage.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

What barriers do Indigenous youth face when learning their language(s)?

As noted, most Indigenous youth surveyed either knew their languages, were learning their languages, or were interested in learning. For 16% of Indigenous youth, there was no way for them to learn, despite them being interested in doing so. Some groups of youth were more likely to say they have no way of learning their language, including youth with multiple Indigenous identities, gender-diverse youth, Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth, youth living in Atlantic provinces, and youth living in the North (except for Nunavut).

% of participants with no way of learning their language, by Indigenous identity:

27% of Afro-Indigenous youth

23% of youth who are both First Nations & Métis

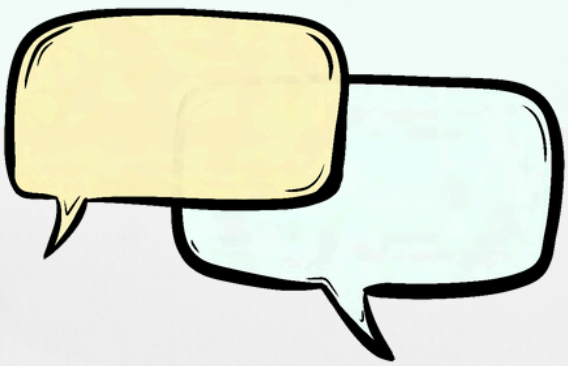
18% of First Nations youth

16% of Inuit youth

7% of Métis youth

Key barriers to language learning identified by the youth include not having enough time to learn because of other commitments like work and school, limited speakers in their languages, financial barriers (either with cost of programming or not being able to take time off work), having to access classes through post-secondary institutions, geographical barriers, classes or programming not being accessible to them, and overall lack of safe spaces.

> **"There are no fluent speakers [near me].**
>
> [...] We have to more or less pick up our boots and go learn it elsewhere. There are no real programs to learn it, and I am working with community on creating one. That will be a long process. Funding is an issue."
>
> *-Survey Participant*



What supports are needed for Indigenous youth in learning their language(s)?

Youth in the survey often felt like they did not have enough time to learn their language with their other commitments or had trouble accessing language programming due to financial constraints. Those who have faced financial barriers in learning their language often said they want to see more free or low-cost programming and more opportunities for grants for language programming. More options for online programming and opportunities to learn at their own pace would be beneficial to many youth who have had a difficult time accessing opportunities due to other commitments, and for youth who live away from their communities or outside of their traditional territories.

> **I have started learning my language,** but the apps available are hard to navigate. I would like to be able to attend in-person classes, but I live far from my home community and they don't speak my language here. I would also be interested in online classes.
>
> *-Survey Participant*



How does culture affect Indigenous youth's sense of wellness?

Youth in the sharing circles explained that connecting to their culture and integrating it into their lives was key in building their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Some participants shared about how things like eating traditional foods, being on the land, and being around their community helps to sustain their wellness. Others shared about how things like ceremony help them build wellness, and about the healing that culture and ceremony can bring.

> **In my language, *Mino Bimaadiziwin* means 'to live a good life' -**
> when I'm in the bush I feel free. I feel like all aspects – mental, physical, emotional, spiritual all align.
>
> *-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant*



For many Indigenous youth, growing up with their culture was not something they were able to do, and are on a journey of reconnection. In the survey, youth who were reconnecting to their culture talked about how doing so helped them feel a sense of belonging and community while reshaping their perspectives and helping them heal. The importance of reconnecting to culture was echoed in the sharing circles, with youth saying that reconnecting to their culture helped them with mental wellness and facing challenges like addiction.

What barriers do Indigenous youth face in building wellness?

When we asked Indigenous youth in the survey what barriers they and other Indigenous youth face in building wellness, the most frequently cited barrier was mental health. The top 5 most selected responses were:

67% Mental Health

65% Not enough time, energy, or too many other responsibilities

63% Not knowing where to start or who to go to

62% Financial barriers / cost of living

47% Lack of access to healthy, affordable foods in stores

We also asked youth in the survey if they felt like climate change impacts their sense of wellness, and if so, what the impacts are. While some youth said that they felt no impact or were unsure, many others shared about how climate change has impacted themselves and their communities. Here, youth often talked about feeling climate anxiety, grief, exhaustion, and concern for future generations as well as animal relations. Some also shared about how climate change has exacerbated health conditions (e.g., asthma). For many Indigenous youth, traditional foods are an important part of their wellness, and climate change has impacted access to these.

> **Yes, being an Inuk from Nunavut,** within my lifetime, I've noticed drastic changes within the environment. I am worried that younger generations won't have the same experiences that I had growing up out on the land. I try my best to stay optimistic, but it has definitely taken a toll on my wellness.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

What supports do Indigenous youth need to build wellness?

Culture, language, and wellness are very much intertwined for many Indigenous youth. In the sharing circles, youth highlighted that many workplaces do not recognize or support cultural practices as a part of wellness. One participant shared about how they appreciate workplaces that offer paid days off for cultural practices, and flexible funds for wellness that could be used to cover cultural items and costs of programming. The sharing circles also saw youth highlighting the need for culturally appropriate mental health resources, with many youth saying that the current services available are not sufficient or are outright violent.

> **When you reconnect, it's jarring** to see how much was lost. We don't know what we did because everyone who knew that is gone. I feel really good when I see others reconnect. Not just doing it for yourself, but doing it for future generations, so they don't feel the disconnect and they will be raised in the culture.
>
> *-Victoria Sharing Circle Participant*

In the survey, the need for more physical spaces to support connection to culture was highlighted, especially for youth in particular demographics. In asking youth if they have a space in their community or where they are living to support their connection to their culture, 35% reported having no space like this, while 65% said that they did have access to such a space. When looking at these responses from different demographics, we can see that some youth are less likely have a space to support cultural connection. These communities were more likely to report not having access to a cultural space:

50% of youth in New Brunswick

50% of youth in the Northwest Territories *(of 2 participants)*

43% of Inuit youth

39% of Métis youth

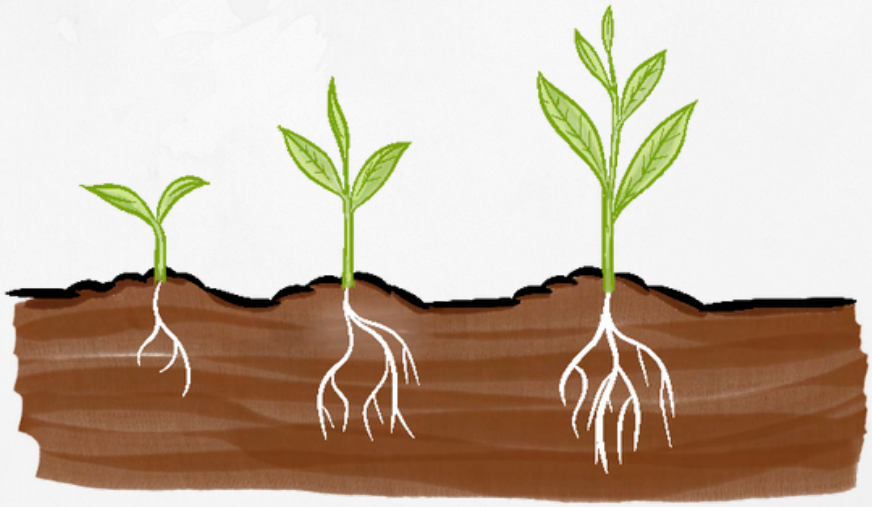
39% of Transgender women

39% of youth in Nova Scotia

39% of youth in British Columbia

39% of youth living in rural or remote communities

37% of Afro-Indigenous youth



THEME 3 AT A GLANCE

Education and Meaningful Work

What does education look like to Indigenous youth?

For many Indigenous youth, education goes beyond getting a degree or diploma. Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, the most selected responses when asked what education means to them were:

83% Learning through lived experiences

81% Learning on the land through observation & practice

64% Oral teachings

64% Learning by participating in ceremonies

64% Getting a degree or diploma from an educational institution

> **Education to me also includes**
> learning my cultural traditions and passing them on to the next generation.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

We also asked youth in the survey about their plans for the next few years. The vast majority (93%) said that they would likely be using their education to contribute positively to and empower their communities. Notably, 70% of Indigenous youth surveyed said that they are planning on moving away from their current community for work, and 57% for school. It is important to note that for some youth moving away for school or work, this may not be a choice but rather a necessity. Many youth also said they plan on obtaining or furthering their post-secondary education, with 39% saying they will likely obtain a trades certificate in the next few years, 48% saying they will likely obtain a college diploma, 67% saying they will likely obtain a bachelor's or master's degree, and 53% saying they will likely obtain a PhD.

83%

of Indigenous youth define education as learning through lived experiences, compared to 64% defining it as getting a degree or diploma.

What barriers do Indigenous youth face in education?

In talking about the barriers they face in education and work, finances and the cost of living were the most recurrent themes. Several youth shared about the lack of available funding for non-status youth, and how not being able to access funding has impacted their educational journey. Some who could access band funding talked about how it is often not adequate or how requirements such as needing to be a full-time student made it hard to access, and some others shared about the lack of accessible scholarship opportunities. For some Métis students, the inconsistencies in funding opportunities across Métis governments has been a barrier. When talking about financial barriers, the cost of living was a common theme that emerged. Many youth shared about needing to work while going to school to support themselves, which puts a strain on their education and impacts their overall wellness.

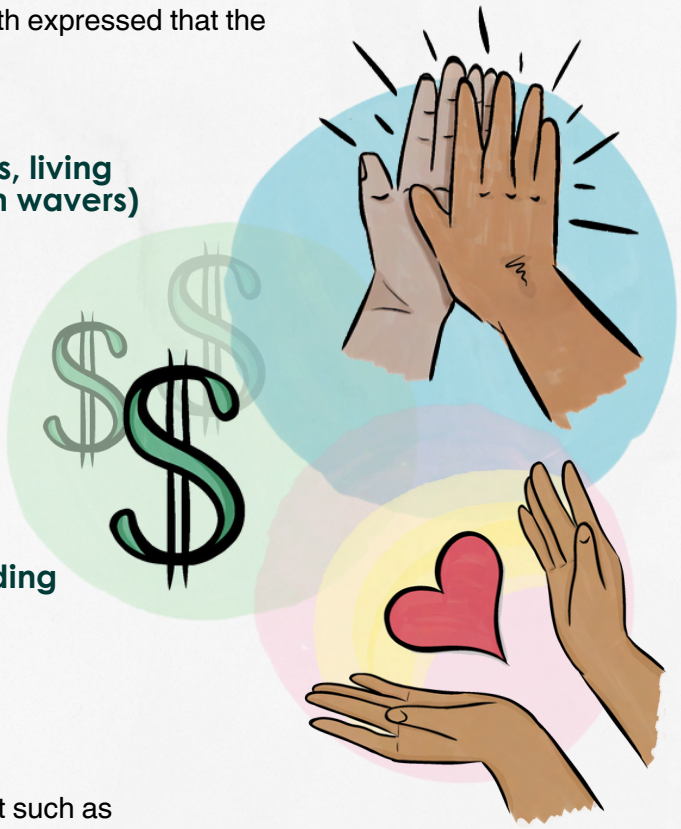
> **I was lucky to have some funding** from my band for school, but we also lost the funding. I worked full time through school, and it was awful on my mental and physical health. I had no social life, and my grades did suffer.
>
> *-East Coast Sharing Circle Participant*

> **There is so much pressure** to do all these things. Once you turn 30 all the funding is gone.
>
> *-On-Reserve Sharing Circle Participant*

Many other barriers also emerged in the sharing circles, such as needing to leave home communities for school (either for secondary or post-secondary), facing discrimination and tokenization in classroom settings, lack of available childcare, and inaccessible post-secondary application processes. Several youth also shared about the lack of resources for Indigenous students, and how difficult it is to find the resources that do exist.

What supports do Indigenous youth need to succeed in education?

In keeping with the conversations summarized above, youth expressed that the top five needed supports for success in education are:



91% Financial assistance (e.g., scholarships, living expenses, education funding or tuition wavers)

52% Indigenous-led education programs

52% Having a safe or supportive learning environment

50% Social, emotional, or cultural supports provided by the school you are attending

43% Access to reliable transportation

Many called for enhanced and accessible financial support such as low-requirement grants. Some youth also called for more supports in finding and applying for available grants and bursaries – and even just applying to school in the first place – as well as wanting to see more assistance from within post-secondary schools for this. For some who have been able to access band funding, this support has been fundamental to their success in education and exemplifies the need to extend sufficient funding to all Indigenous post-secondary students.

Many also reflected on the need to recognize lived experiences and traditional knowledge as valid forms of education, while calling for post-secondary spaces to be better tailored to Indigenous students. Several youth also talked about how more cultural and wellness supports should be provided by institutions to ensure that Indigenous young people are able to succeed in these spaces.

How do Indigenous youth define meaningful work and its impacts?

In reviewing survey answers to the question "how do you define meaningful work?," wealth, finances, and money were not key elements of youth definitions, but community, giving back, and helping people were front and center. We also asked youth what kind of impacts they would like to see come from their labour, and their responses indicate a deep commitment to improving their communities, advocating for change at all levels, and supporting youth, Indigenous women, and Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth.

> **'Meaningful work' to me** means contributing for the advancement and betterment of my people and my community.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

LANGUAGE NOTE

For the purposes of this project, we are using an expansive definition of "work" that is not limited to selling labour for wages. Work can include domestic labour, land defense and advocacy, volunteer and community work, and other forms of unpaid labour.



Several participants focused on meaningful work as advocacy that advances Indigenous rights and holds the Canadian government accountable for past and ongoing violence and discrimination. Some youth talked about this in the context of working to create systemic change through policy work and advocacy, and many talked about it in relation to land defense and activism. Supporting Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ communities and empowering Indigenous women was also a key impact and part of youth's definitions of meaningful work. Most importantly, youth's ideas about meaningful work and its impacts were not money-centered but rooted in values, connection, relationships, and holistic health.

> **Meaningful work is work that positively impacts** others (people, land, animals, other relations) and does not increase harm in the world (fear, negative impacts on environment, hurting other relations for personal gain). Meaningful work instills a sense of inner purpose that goes beyond income and material wealth.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

What supports do Indigenous youth need to pursue meaningful work?

In asking youth what supports they need to find or maintain meaningful work, youth created a clear plan for service providers, policymakers, and employers. Across First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth, the most frequently identified supports needed for Indigenous youth to pursue meaningful work was social, emotional, or cultural supports; having a safe and supportive work environment; mentors, job coaches or job shadowing programs; Indigenous youth job training programs; and Indigenous-led career opportunities.

Top 5 supports needed for youth to pursue meaningful work:

52% Social, emotional, or cultural supports

52% Having a safe or supportive work environment

51% Mentors, job coaches, or job shadowing programs

51% Indigenous youth job training programs

45% Indigenous-led career opportunities

Some response differences were visible when looking at answers by Indigenous identity - Inuit youth included having access to Indigenous-led career opportunities in their top 3 supports, where First Nations and Métis youth did not. Métis youth ranked having a safe or supportive work environment higher than First Nations and Inuit youth did. Notably, 37% of people with a disability identified universal basic income as one of their most needed supports to pursue meaningful work, compared to 17.2% of people without a disability.

Overall, the majority of Indigenous youth surveyed (76%) felt optimistic about the meaningful work opportunities being made available to them and other Indigenous youth in the future.

37%

of survey participants with a disability identified universal basic income as one of their most needed supports to pursue meaningful work, compared to 17.2% of participants without a disability.

What does success in education and work mean to Indigenous youth?

Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, when asked to select what success in education and work means to them, the top five most selected definitions were:

54% Working toward the advancement of Indigenous peoples

53% Being in a position to help out my family and community

52% Being a role model to family and/or community members

42% Being able to focus on collective success rather than individual gain

41% Building meaningful relationships with my family, peers, and communities

In the sharing circles, youth often said they want to see their work and education impact their communities in a positive way. Some shared that they hope they can pass along their knowledge and skills to other Indigenous youth and people in their communities. Several participants talked about goals they have for working in spaces that are a shift from the traditional nine-to-five type of work and that move away from the typical colonial environments of many workplaces.

Another common theme that emerged was that Indigenous youth often feel like success in education and work is tied to their ability to have a work-life balance and being able to participate in cultural activities without worrying about repercussions from time off from work or school.



> **A successful education space would be inclusive and adaptable**
>
> to those most discriminated against by colonialism and systemic racism, especially those excluded by disabilities who have so many more barriers to accessing those spaces equitably.
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant*

How do Indigenous youth envision the future of education and meaningful work?

In discussing what opportunities in work and education they would like available 5-10 years from now, youth often spoke about a future where these spaces are reshaped and decolonized. Some youth talked about wanting to see things like land-based learning incorporated into education, while others shared visions of a future where work and education are flexible and tailored to an individual's needs.

> **[Meaningful education] is looking at a decolonized idea of what 'school' is,** such as taking kids on the land and teaching them how to skin a deer. Teaching what was once common knowledge.
>
> *-Halifax Sharing Circle Participant*

Many youth also talked about wanting to see the financial burdens of education be eased, either through increased access scholarships and grants or by eliminating tuition all together. Some also brought up the need to remove barriers for people living with a disability to access education, saying that the structure of education now often does not set up these students to succeed. Overall, youth envision a future where there are more Indigenous-led programs at educational institutions, and where education is accessible to youth living in all areas of the country.

When discussing the future of work specifically, youth often brought up how they want to see a future where the current Western idea of professionalism isn't the standard. Many also expressed their desire to see more flexible workplaces that are invested in the wellness of their employees, and that are culturally safe, inclusive, and respectful. For many Indigenous youth, workplaces that are more aligned to Indigenous ways of being are what they envision for the future.



THEME 4 AT A GLANCE

Reconciliation and Solidarity

What does reconciliation mean to Indigenous youth?

To ground the conversation in shared understanding, we started with a definition of reconciliation as the establishment and maintenance of a respectful, just, and equal relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. We understand that everyone may have a different definition of reconciliation, different thoughts on how it can be achieved, and different opinions on whether it can be achieved at all.

When talking with youth in the sharing circles about their thoughts on reconciliation, a key theme that emerged was the need for settlers and settler governments to refocus on the truth part of truth and reconciliation. Youth emphasized that educating Canadians about this truth is not the responsibility of Indigenous peoples. Several youth expressed that actions of reconciliation cannot be meaningful until all of the truth is shared, understood, and respected.

Indigenous youth's top 5 definitions of reconciliation:

70% Honouring Treaties

67% Land Back

52% Ending all instiutional racism

48% Self-governance for all Indigenous Peoples

46% Access to education



There is 'truth' in Truth and Reconciliation and people forget that.

People fail to recognize the truth because they are ignorant or not taught. Sweeping the truth aspect and going straight to reconciliation, it's like going backwards. Reconciliation, I see it as agreements between communities, nations, governments. [...] I get nervous about how non-Indigenous people shy away from truth or think maybe I will turn them off if I speak the truth. They realize they don't know a lot and they get scared of how much they don't know.

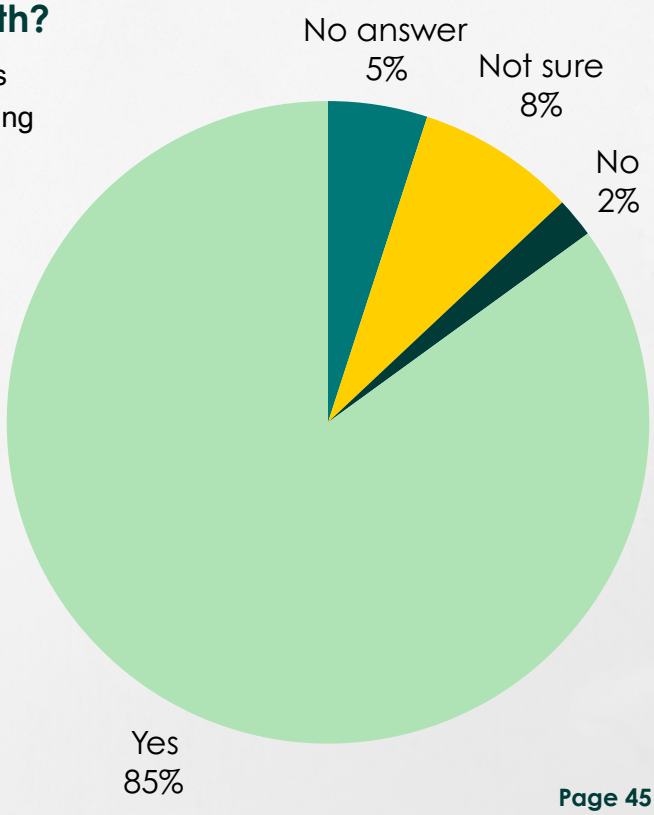
-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant

Some other ways Indigenous youth described reconciliation in the sharing circles, and actions that feel like reconciliation to them include:

- An ongoing process, not a checklist
- The acknowledgement of history
- Moving away from stereotypes and misinformation
- Putting in effort to learn about the history of Indigenous peoples
- An agreement between communities, nations, and governments
- Being able to practice culture and speak traditional languages
- Feeling safe
- Going beyond land acknowledgements

Is reconciliation important to Indigenous youth?

In the survey, 85% of Indigenous youth said that reconciliation is important to them. Only 2% of Indigenous youth responded saying no, with 8% being unsure and 5% preferring not to say. Youth in the sharing circles echoed this, saying that to them, reconciliation is an important step in healing from the past and ensuring that Indigenous peoples are treated equitably. While talking about how reconciliation is important, some youth also questioned if it can happen at all.



> **[Reconciliation] is important to me but is it fully achievable?**
> There are definitely actions that are achievable but how much support are you going to get if the racism is still prevalent?
>
> *-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant*

Conversely, some youth shared that reconciliation is not important to them or is not a priority. For some Indigenous youth, focusing on healing within their own communities was more important. For others, reconciliation was not possible while many Indigenous communities still lack the necessities to live like clean drinking water and safe housing, saying this needs to happen before anything else can.

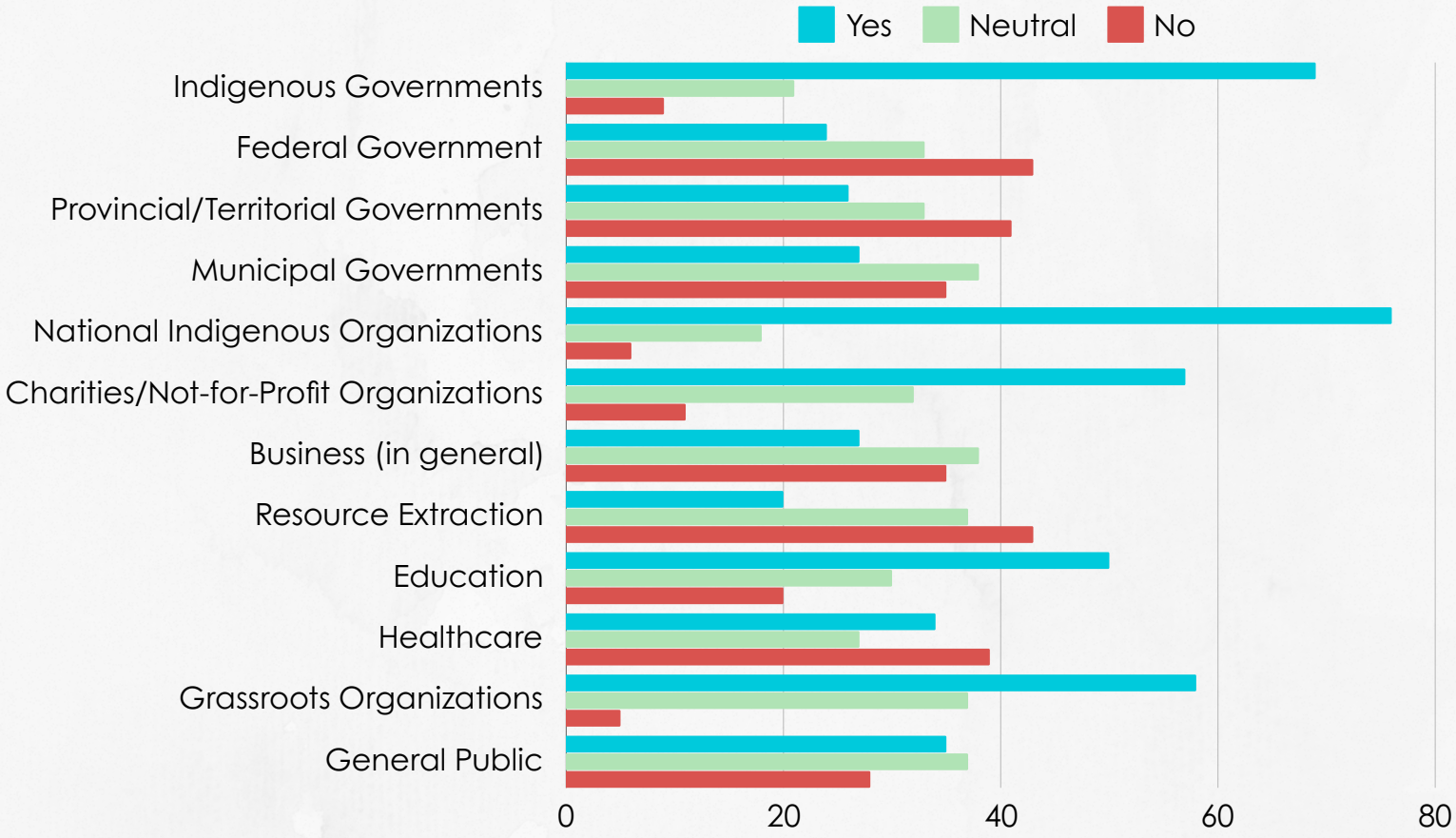
> **How are we supposed to reconcile** when the basic needs aren't met across our people?
>
> *-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant*

How do Indigenous youth see the future of reconciliation?

In the survey, we asked Indigenous youth about how committed they felt different sectors were to reconciliation. Indigenous youth most frequently agreed that national Indigenous organizations are committed to reconciliation at 76%. This is followed by Indigenous governments, at 69%. When looking at how committed youth feel governments and businesses are to reconciliation, only 24% agreed that the federal government was committed, 26% agreed that provincial and territorial governments were committed, and 27% of municipal governments and businesses were committed. Indigenous youth believed that these sectors are the least committed to reconciliation.



Are these sectors committed to reconciliation?



We also asked Indigenous youth if they felt the Government of Canada has made any progress toward towards reconciliation. Only 10% of Indigenous youth felt like the Government of Canada has made a lot of progress toward reconciliation, with 24% saying they felt no progress has been made.

In the survey, we asked youth to let us know what actions they would like to see in the next 5-10 years toward reconciliation. Many shared that they would like to see actions like land back, reparations, having the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action fully implemented, systems and policy reform, and basic needs being met. Some also shared about wanting to see things like access to affordable housing for Indigenous people, Indigenous self-government, and full accountability from the Government of Canada.

> **"We need more effective climate action worldwide, taxing the rich and returning** these funds to Indigenous people as part of #LandBack, federal and provincial governments battling houselessness as a top priority, and subsidizing inflation costs, specifically on reserves where healthy food is already incredibly expensive."
>
> *-Survey Participant*

How do Indigenous youth define solidarity and allyship?

Indigenous youth in the sharing circles defined allyship as active support and understanding that do not center feelings of guilt. Others added to this, describing allyship as being held accountable and being comfortable with discomfort.

In providing examples of what solidarity and allyship mean to them in practice, youth talked about supporting Indigenous businesses, artists, professionals, and frontline advocates as a practical way to practice solidarity and allyship. Many youth in the sharing circles also described allyship and accountability as the responsibility of non-Indigenous Canadians, especially when it manifests as building inclusivity and using their privilege(s) to break down and challenge oppressive systems. Both allyship and solidarity should involve active listening, continuous education, and the amplification of Indigenous voices rather than prescribed methods to be an ally.

LANGUAGE NOTE

For the purposes of starting these discussions, we differentiated allyship as being white-settler specific and solidarity referring more to unity and connection with other marginalized communities.

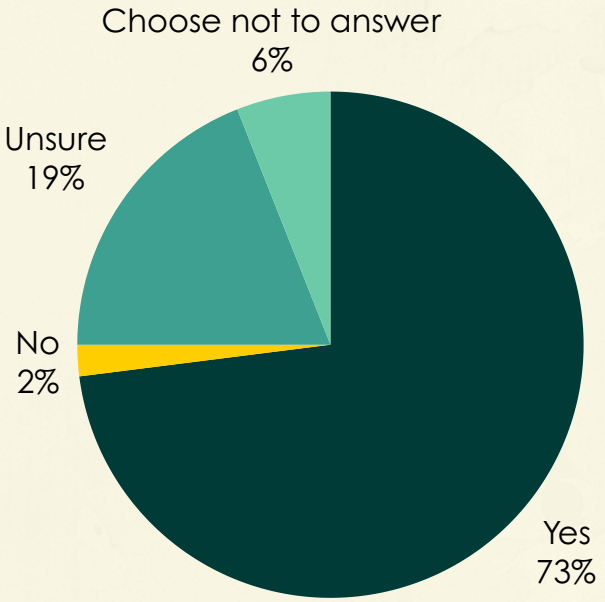
> **Moving away from the guilt to standing up for the Indigenous peers.** Allyship shouldn't be pitiful...does your thought process go past being sorry? It is about showing up, understanding the land they are on, and understanding communities' needs.
>
> *-Montréal Sharing Circle Participant*

> **True solidarity is genuine, ongoing support that goes beyond** performative actions or token gestures. It's about respecting and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups while actively working to challenge and change systems of oppression.
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant*

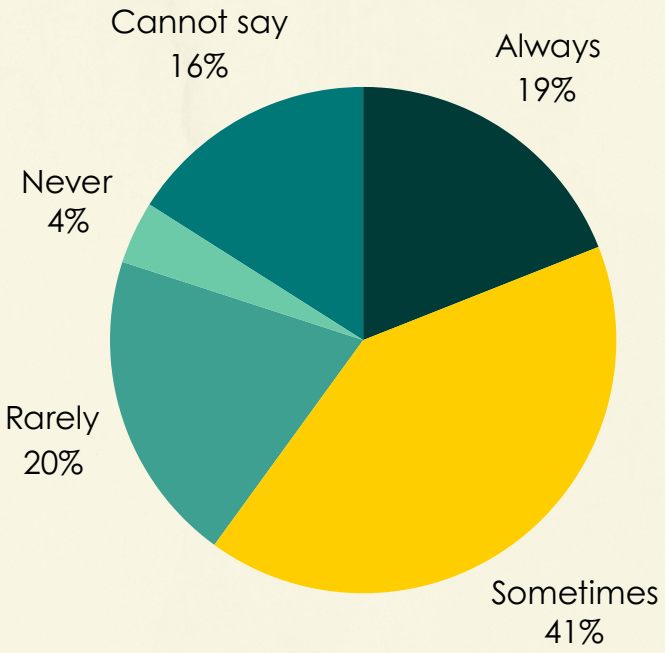
How important are solidarity and allyship to Indigenous youth?

Indigenous youth want to see more of their communities engaging in solidarity activities. When asked whether solidarity with other marginalized communities is important to them, the overwhelming majority (73%) said yes, while 2% said no, 19% were unsure, and 6% chose not to answer. In specifically reviewing answers from Afro-Indigenous youth, 83.3% reported that solidarity was important to them, while 16.7% reported that they were unsure. However, when Indigenous youth were asked how often the community they belong to connects with other marginalized communities 19% said always, 41% said sometimes, 20% said rarely, 4% said never, and 16% selected “cannot say.”

Is solidarity with other marginalized communities important to you?



How often does your community connect with other marginalized communities today?



Youth generally reported that settler allyship is important to them for a range of reasons including the usefulness of settler allies using their positions of power to create spaces for Indigenous youth to lead and to amplify Indigenous voices, and because unity and support in numbers has potential to create more and faster change. Many youth also spoke to the pitfalls of settler allyship, especially when it becomes performative or superficial rather than meaningful.

> **As an Indigenous person, I am cautious of settler allyship**
>
> because a lot of the time I've watched white settlers center themselves in the conversation or take up space/time from Indigenous people. Settler allyship is important to me when they center Indigenous peoples in the conversation or do immediate actions to support them like financially or giving up their position of power.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

In addition to direct forms of racism, discrimination, and harassment, youth identified activities and practices that undermine solidarity such as:

- Tokenism
- Performative allyship (When white activist actions don't align with white activist words)
- Dismissing Indigenous experiences
- Cultural appropriation
- Commodification of Indigenous social justice causes

What do Indigenous youth want for the future of solidarity?

The youth in the sharing circles described a vision for solidarity and allyship based on mutual respect and active participation in fostering meaningful relationships and reconciliation. One participant from the Inuit Nunangat Sharing Circle describes what this future looks like to them:

> **Solidarity and allyship with the Inuit should involve active listening,** learning about their culture, and advocating for their rights while respecting their autonomy. It means amplifying Inuit voices, promoting cultural sensitivity, and standing against discrimination. On the other side, it shouldn't involve patronizing attitudes, tokenism, ignoring issues, assuming homogeneity, or centering oneself in the process.
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant*

In the survey, we also asked Indigenous youth about what actions they would like to see toward solidarity five to ten years in the future. Here, youth envisioned a future where there are more connections made between Indigenous communities and other marginalized groups, where more people are educated on and respect Indigenous rights, and where young people are leading this work.

> **In the next 5 to 10 years I hope to see more cross-community collaborations,** working together to address shared concerns. For example, organizing joint events, promoting resource-sharing initiatives, and collectively advocating for social justice and equality.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

Shifts from the 2019 Barometer

In the results we were able to compare to the 2019 reconciliation barometer, it became clear that Indigenous youth in 2024 are more concerned with finding and creating community connection and living a balanced life rather than on material, wealth-based achievements. In part, this might highlight the very different context of 2023/2024 compared to 2018/2019; the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing housing and affordability crises, and the escalating climate crises have been a wake-up call for many to reassess their priorities, and to become engaged in activism and advocacy. These contexts have helped form a sense of urgency for Indigenous youth to advocate for a more sustainable future for themselves and for generations to come, often in opposition to capitalist interests and political will.

In looking at the barriers Indigenous youth are facing to achieving their goals, finances and mental health challenges were top factors in 2019 and have remained so in this year's Barometer project. In looking at what inspires and motivates them to achieve their goals, youth in the 2019 Barometer were much more likely to cite personal drive as their top motivator while Indigenous youth in this year's Barometer were more likely to select support from family and friends.

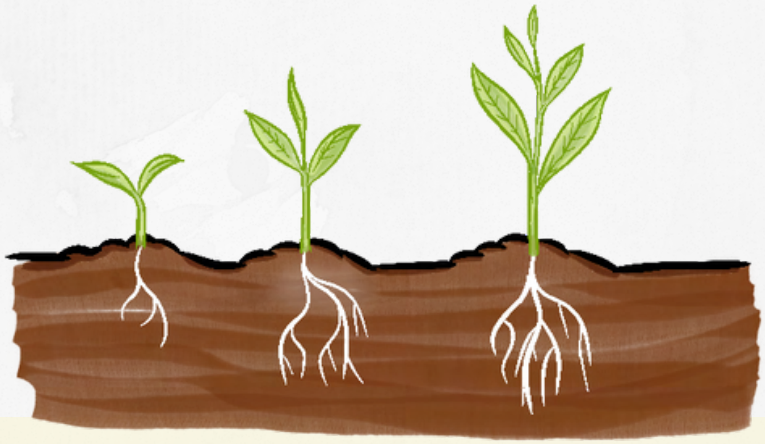
In examining how Indigenous youth's ideas of reconciliation have changed, youth answering the 2019 Barometer spoke about rebuilding relationships and trust, apologies, and repairing past wrongs. Notably, only 2% mentioned money as part of their understanding of reconciliation, and a large number - 36% - could not answer the question at all. Despite this, three-quarters (75%) of Indigenous youth who participated in the 2019 Barometer said they were somewhat if not very optimistic about the prospect of meaningful reconciliation in their lifetime.

In this year's Barometer, we asked questions that got more specific about what specific sectors are demonstrating their commitment to reconciliation through actions. Of the sectors listed, Indigenous youth most frequently agreed that national Indigenous organizations are committed to reconciliation at 76%. This is followed by Indigenous governments, at 69%. The sectors that Indigenous youth did not identify as being committed to reconciliation most frequently were the federal government at 24% and provincial and territorial governments at 26%. We asked youth in the survey about how optimistic they felt about what actions they want to see toward reconciliation happening in the future. Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, 51% said they felt optimistic about these visions happening.

Indigenous Youth are Building Abundant, Connected Futures

The stories youth shared with us weave a complex tapestry of all the different ways they understand empowerment, connection, culture, community, reconciliation, and solidarity, and this report only scratches the surface of those understandings. IYR is committed to continuing to publish more in-depth content based on the information we've gathered for this project, and in ensuring that youth and their communities can use this information to advocate for the policy and law reform they need, and to build up services and programming where that is needed too.

The future Indigenous youth are building is one where their communities are bound together by respect and accountability, and where BIPOC communities are always showing up for each other in meaningful ways. Notably, it was youth who belong to multiple communities impacted by different kinds of systemic oppression and discrimination (such as youth who identify as Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+, Afro-Indigenous youth, and youth with disabilities) who affirmed the importance of solidarity the most. On reconciliation, most youth don't see municipal, territorial, or federal governments as entities that are committed to reconciliation, and feel that the truth part of truth and reconciliation has not been integrated into government policy or public discourse enough. Youth understand both reconciliation and solidarity to require tangible action, not performative or scripted gestures.



Indigenous youth tie their sense of wellness and community to their ability to practice their culture, no matter where they live. As they conceptualize what self-determination looks like in relation to all of this, their visions stretch far beyond the necessities of clean water and safe housing, though those of course remain crucial. This means communities with abundant and accessible Elder supports, addictions services, community centres, language learning programs, and Indigenous-led educational facilities and health care facilities.

Wherever possible, we've sought to build policy and program recommendations out of the stories and wisdom shared by the Indigenous youth we spoke to. The recommendations found in the final section of the report are a starting place and will hopefully provide a window into the future Indigenous youth are already building. For sectors invested in uplifting and empowering youth voices, the recommendations found in the final section of the report provide a starting point on that path. IYR looks forward to continuing to find ways to use the information we've gathered for this report to craft advocacy tools for youth and their communities.

Demographic Analysis

Between the survey and all sharing circles, we engaged with a total of 1,125 Indigenous youth from coast-to-coast-to-coast. This section will explore who those youth are based on what they reported about the following factors:

- their Indigenous identities,
- where they live,
- what type of community they live in,
- how old they are,
- their gender identities,
- their disability statuses, and
- their work and education experience levels

While starting with breaking down Indigenous identities, each following subsection will overlay and cross-tabulate Indigenous identity with the other factors listed above. This means that we have produced data tables outlining:

- First Nations, Métis, and Inuit participants, each separately broken down by:
  - province/territory
  - community type
  - age
- disability status
- Two-Spirit participants by province/territory
- Youth living with a disability by province/territory

We understand identity to be multi-dimensional, intersectional, and infinitely complex, so we know that these lists can't capture the whole of someone's identity. Our hope here is to contextualize the stories and wisdom of the participants by providing a demographic sketch of who we spoke to. We're sure we won't be able to cover everything in a single report, and that's why we look forward to continuing to publish smaller, more focused reports and will be exploring other ways to interact with and amplify the Barometer 2024 data in the future!

1,125

Indigenous youth from coast to coast to coast

CROSS-TABULATING

is when you compare one set of data (like age ranges) with another set of data (like community type) to analyze findings about specific subgroups (for example, 20-22 year olds living on-reserve)

STATS NOTE

some percentage totals will not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding and collapsing of some categories, as noted in the Data Analysis section above.

Indigenous Identity - First Nations, Métis, and Inuit

Looking at the Indigenous identity breakdown of the youth who participated in the project, most participants were First Nations (68.4%), followed by Métis (15.8%) and then Inuit (12.4%). Across all participants, 3.4% were Afro-Indigenous and another 3.4% identified as multiple identities (mostly First Nations and Métis). Some youth selected multiple Indigenous identities, which are seen in their own distinct categories in the Indigenous Identity Breakdown graph. Youth who selected any Indigenous identity as well as Black within our demographic questionnaire are identified below under "Afro-Indigenous," as well as within their respective First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit category. As Afro-Indigenous youth are represented twice within the breakdown, the total number of participants represented in the graph will add up to more than 100%.

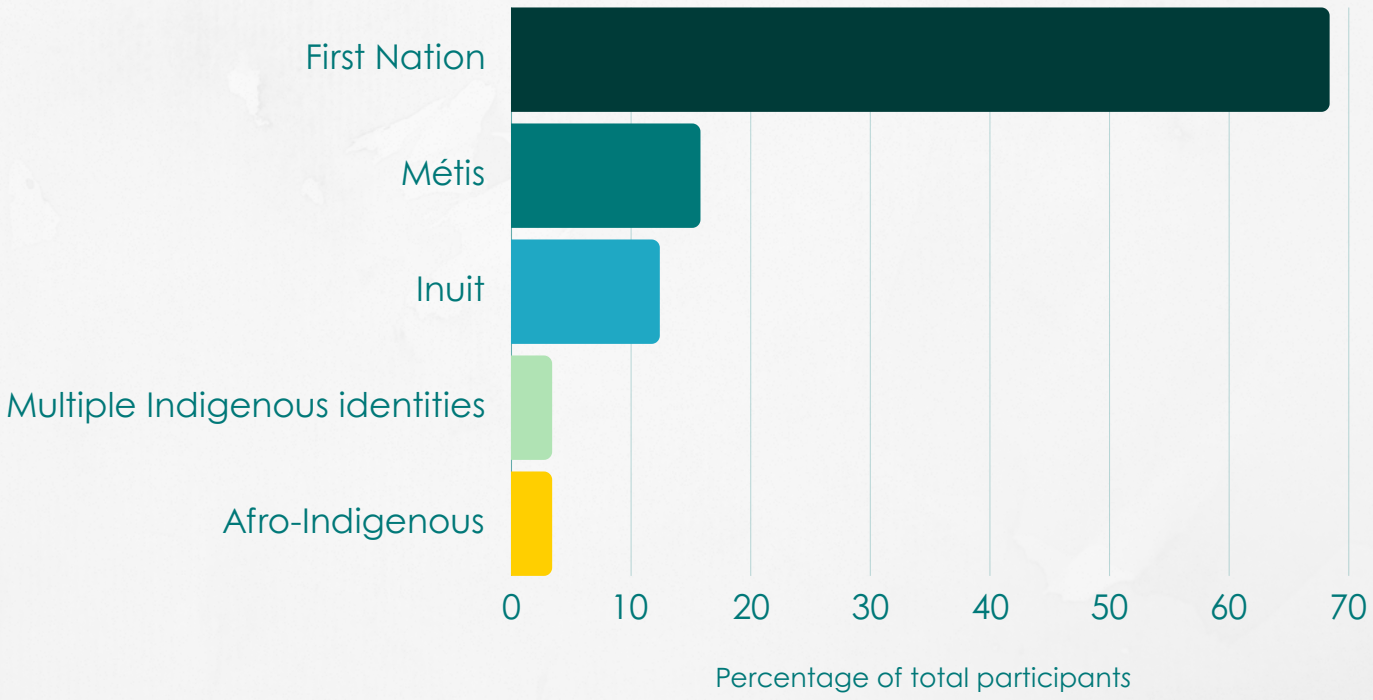
2021 Indigenous Peoples Survey, Statistics Canada

Note: these stats reflect the whole Indigenous population, not just youth.

# of Indigenous people in Canada: 1,807,250 - 5% of the total population

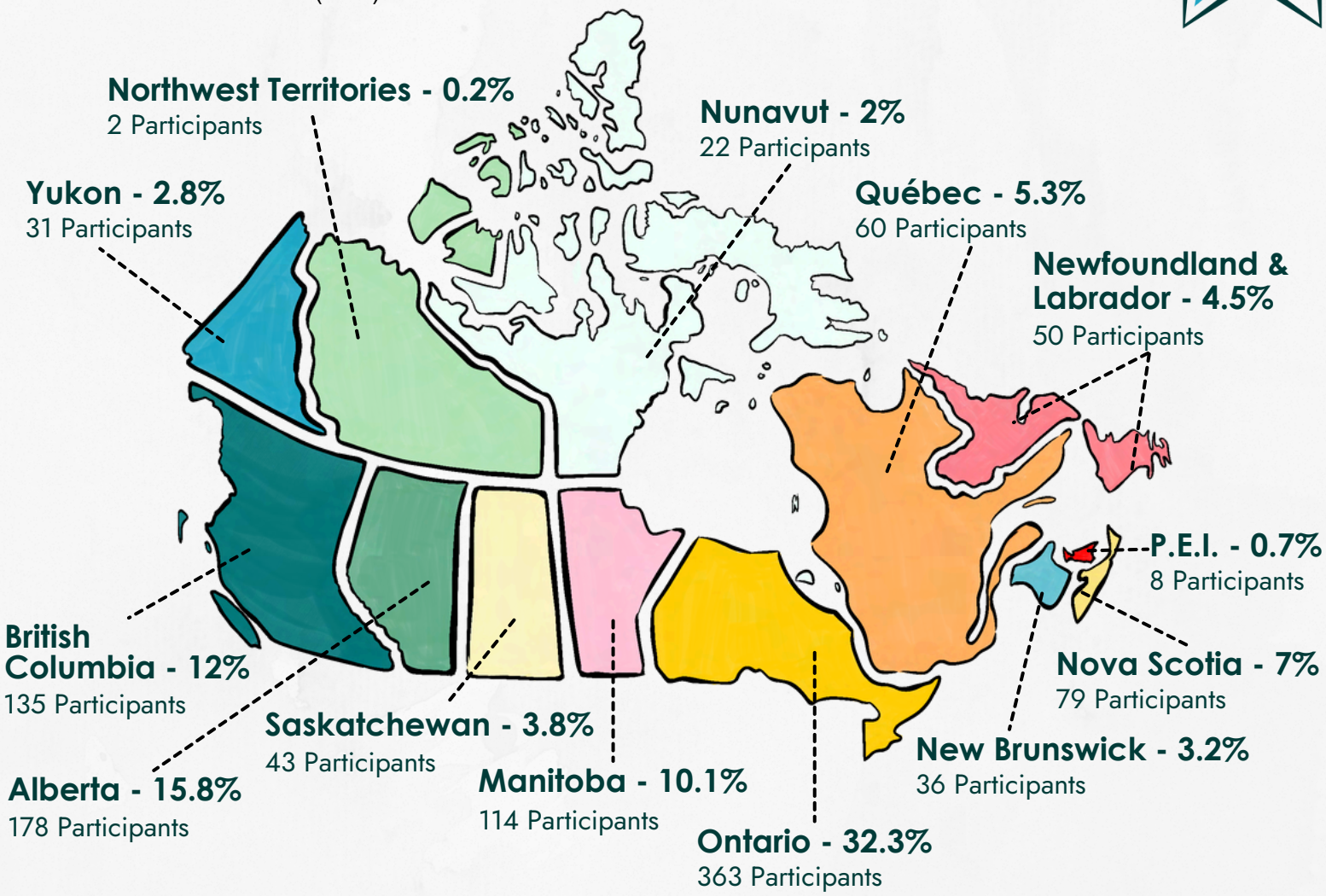
First Nations - 58%
Métis - 34.5%
Inuit - 3.9%
Multiple identities - 1.6%
Other/Identity not included - 1.9%

Indigenous Identity Breakdown

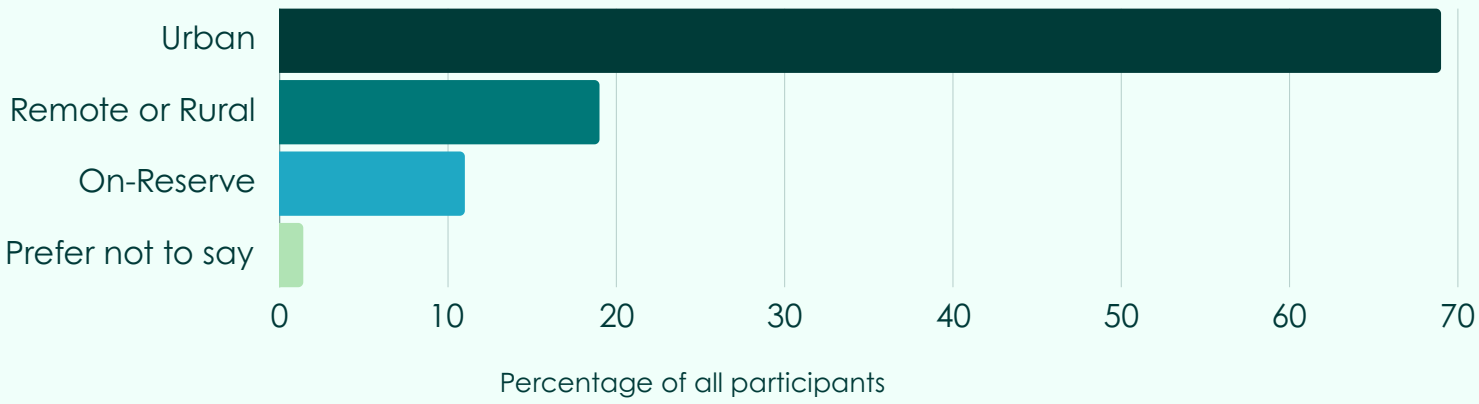


Province, Territory and Community Type Breakdown

Consistent with where most Indigenous people in Canada live, most participants were from Ontario (32.3%), followed by Alberta (15.8%) and British Columbia (12%). A wide majority of participants were from urban areas (69.4%), followed by remote or rural areas (18.5%), then On-Reserve areas (11%).

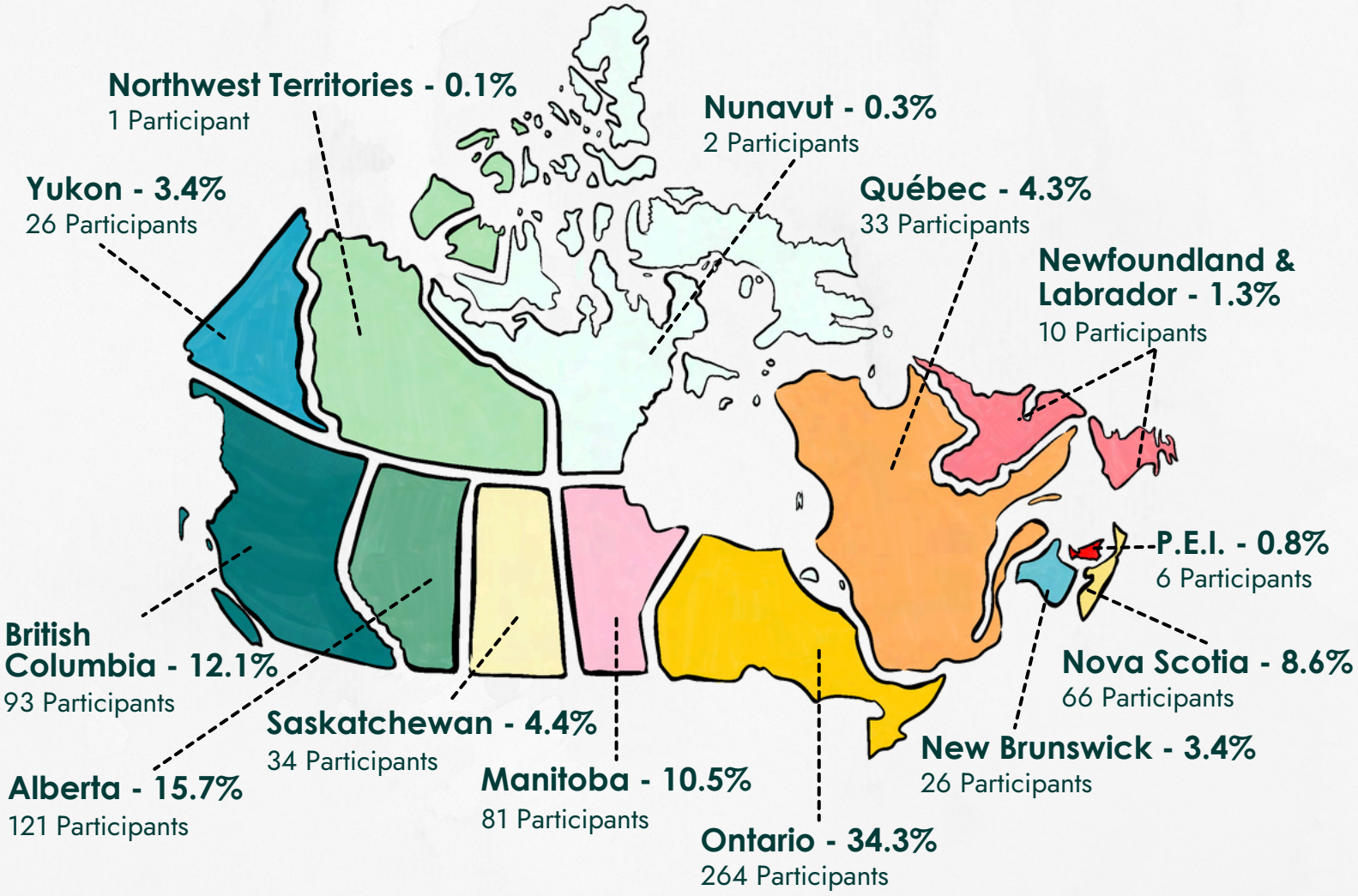


Community Type Breakdown - All Participants

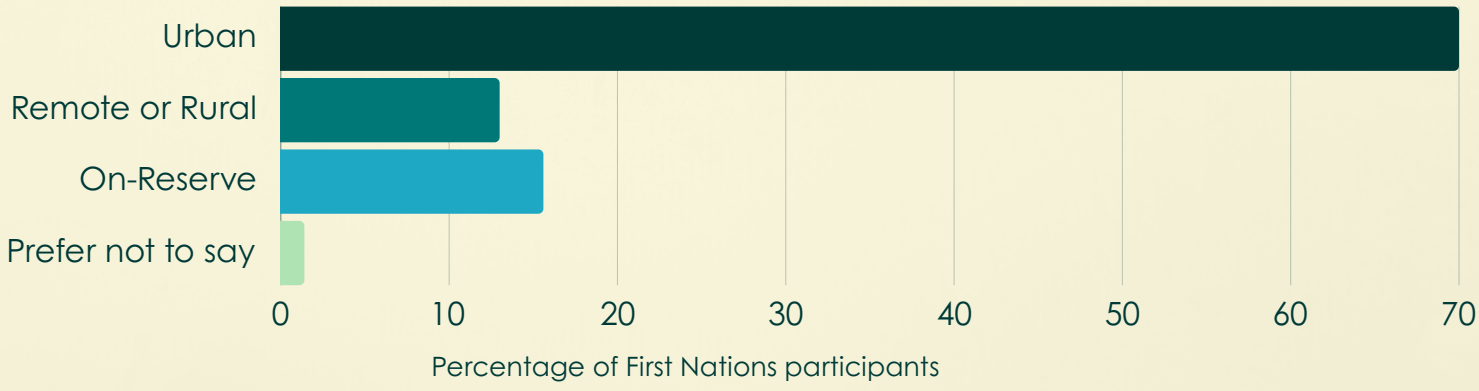


Most First Nations participants were from Ontario (34.3%), followed by Alberta and British Columbia at 15.7% and 12.1%, respectively. Most First Nations participants were from urban areas (70.0%), followed by On-Reserve areas (15.6%).

First Nations Participants by Province and Territory

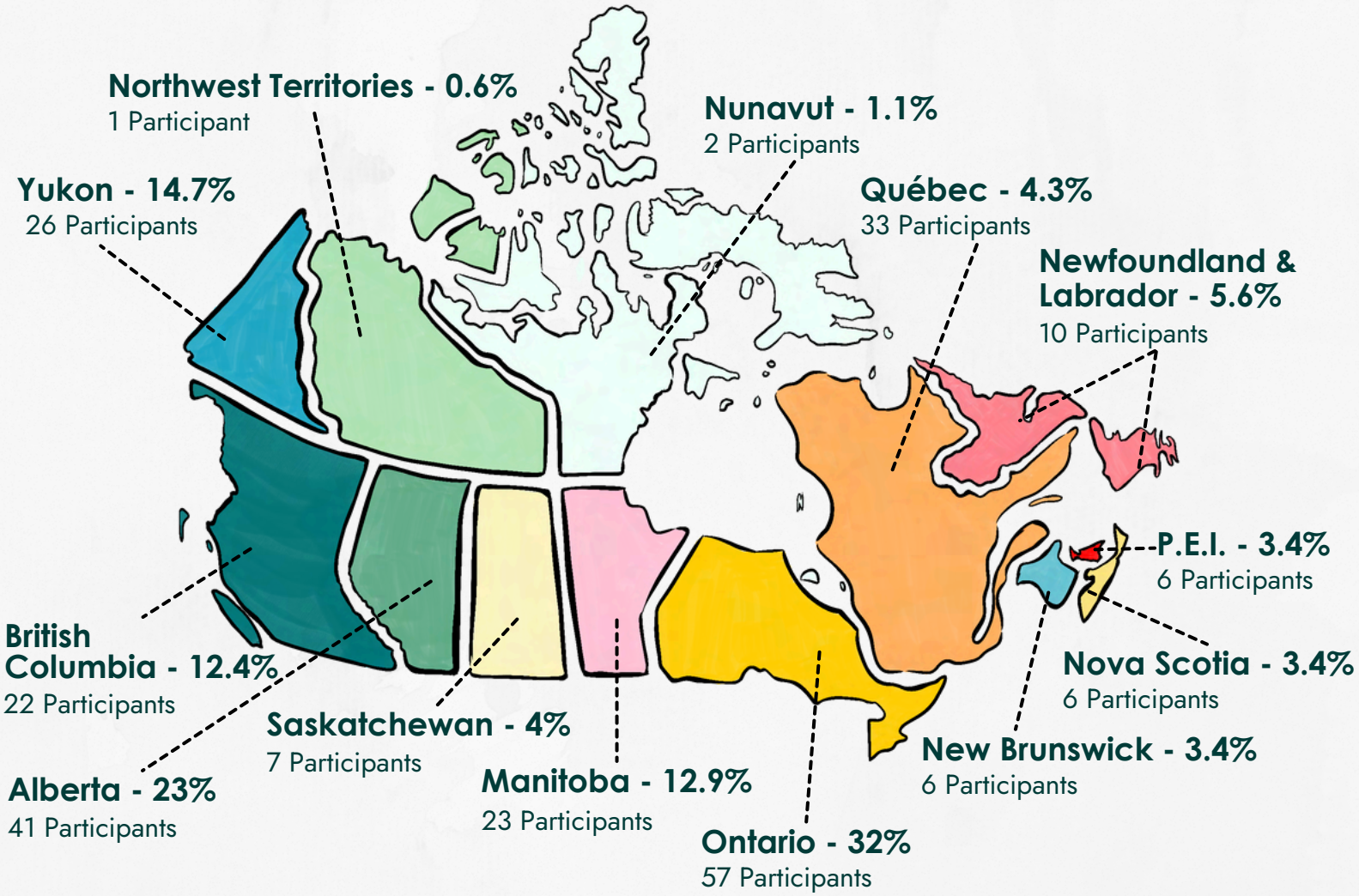


Community Type Breakdown - First Nations Participants

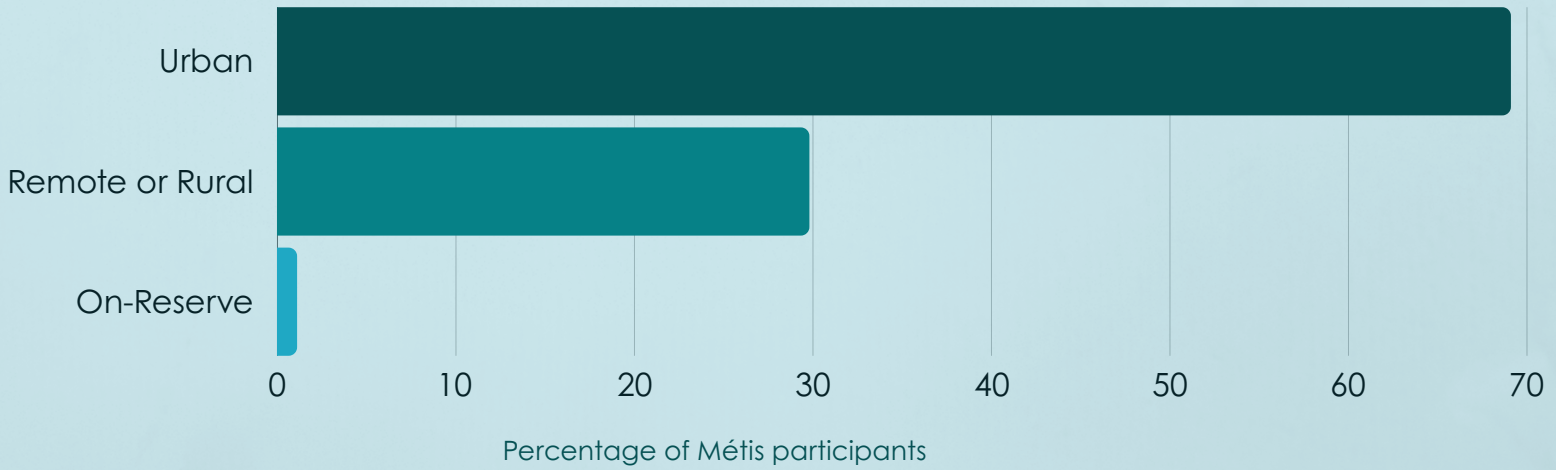


Most Métis participants were from Ontario (32%), followed by Alberta and Manitoba, with 23.0% and 12.9% Métis participants being from these provinces, respectively. Most Métis participants were from urban areas (69.1%), followed by remote or rural areas (29.8%).

Métis Participants by Province and Territory

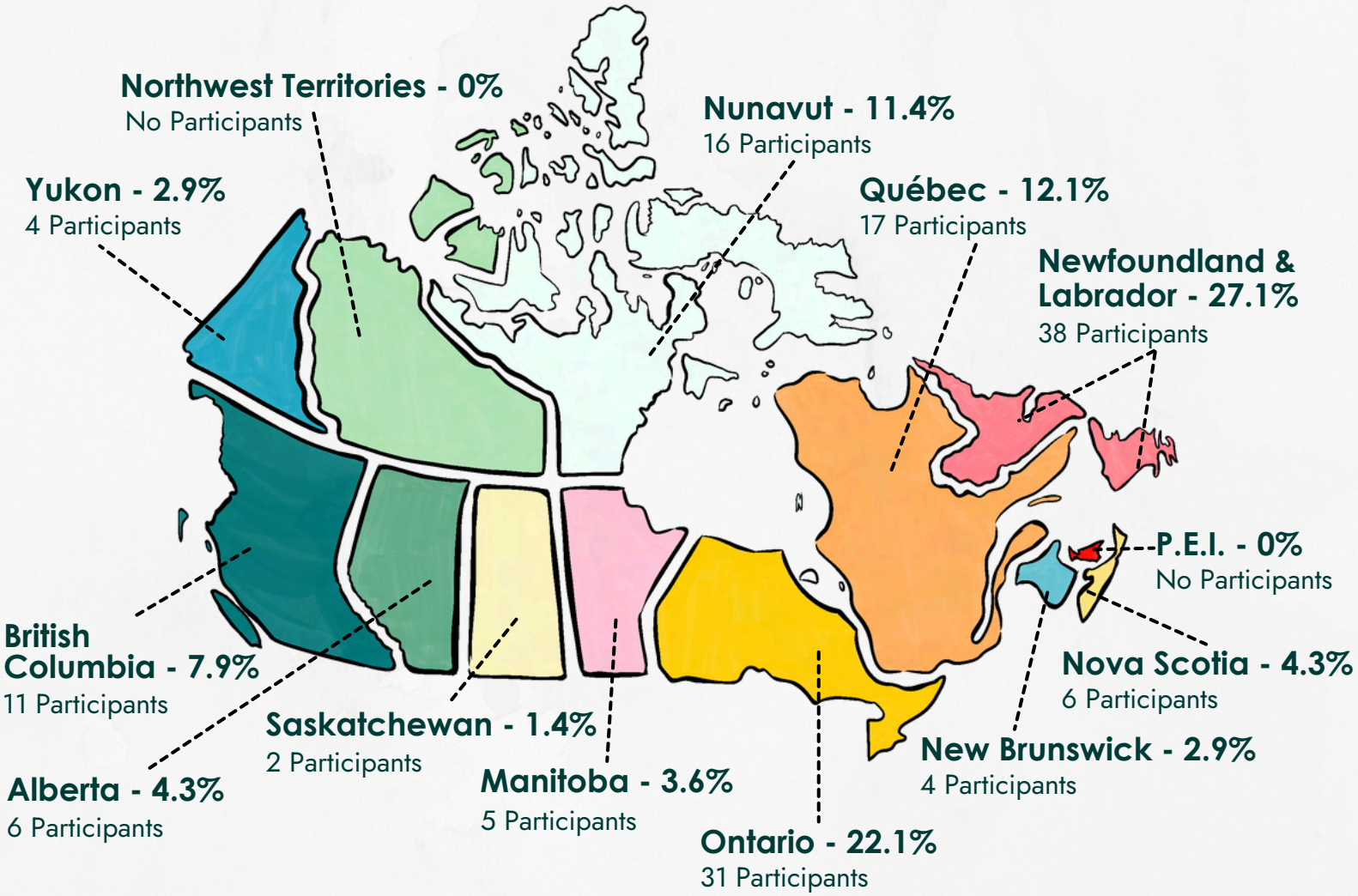


Métis Participants by Community Type

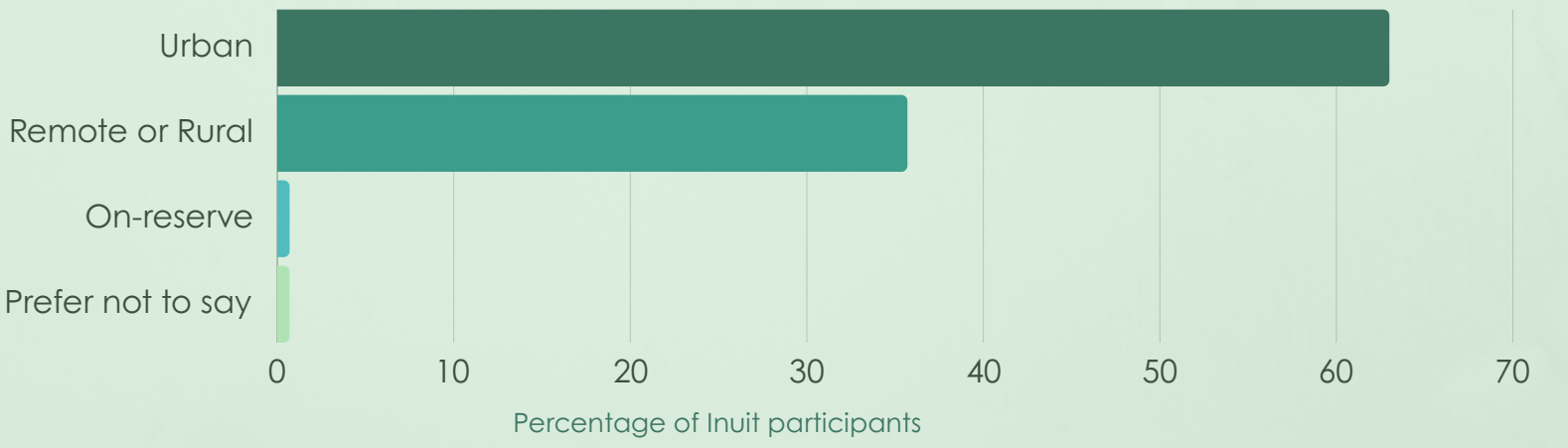


Most Inuit participants were from Ontario (22.1%), followed by Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec, with 27.1% and 12.1% of Inuit participants being from these provinces, respectively. Most Inuit participants were from urban areas (63.0%), followed by remote or rural areas (35.7%). Of the 140 Inuit participants, 46 (or 33%) were living in Inuit Nunangat at the time of participating.

Inuit Participants by Province and Territory



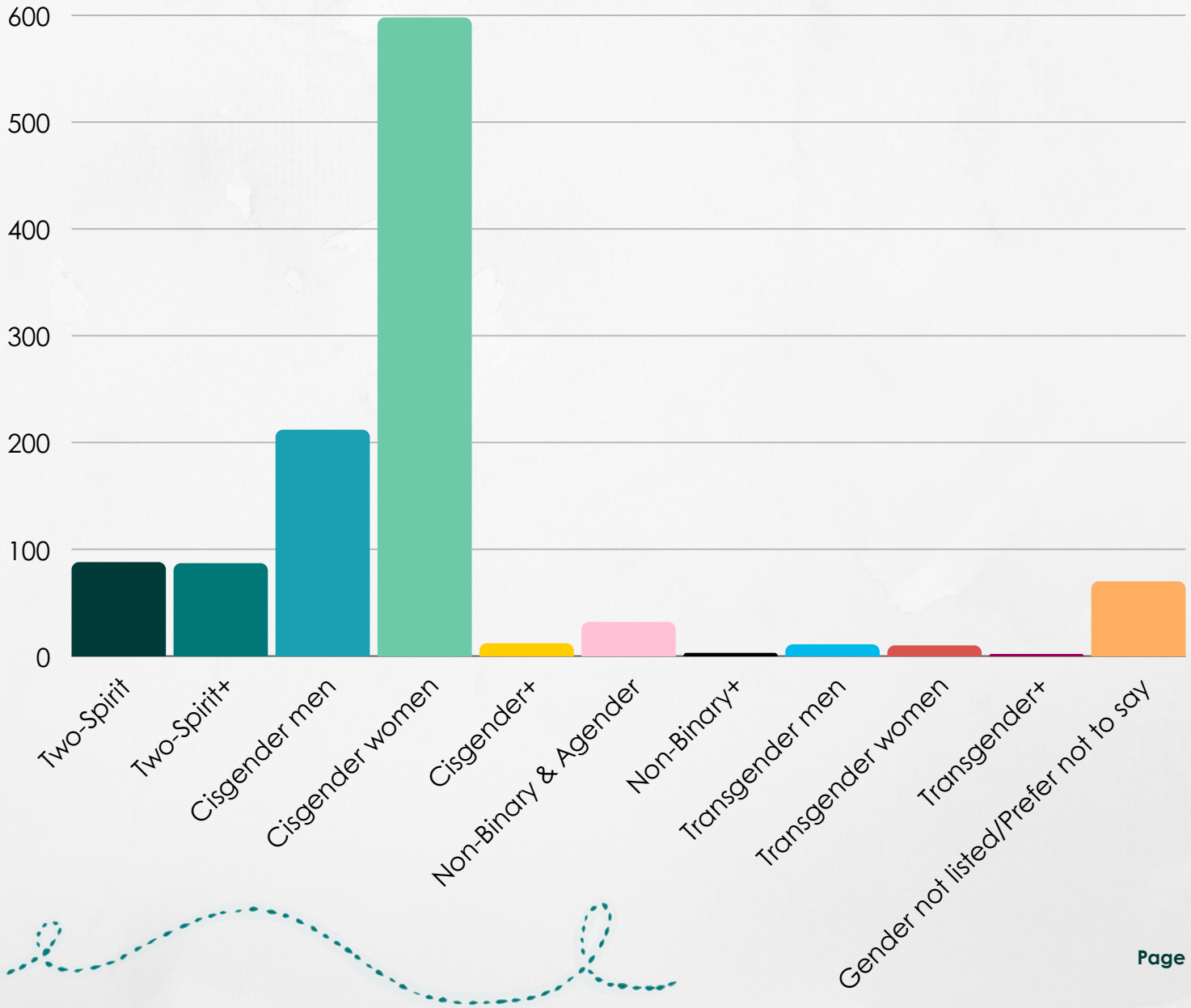
Inuit Participants by Community Type



Gender Identities

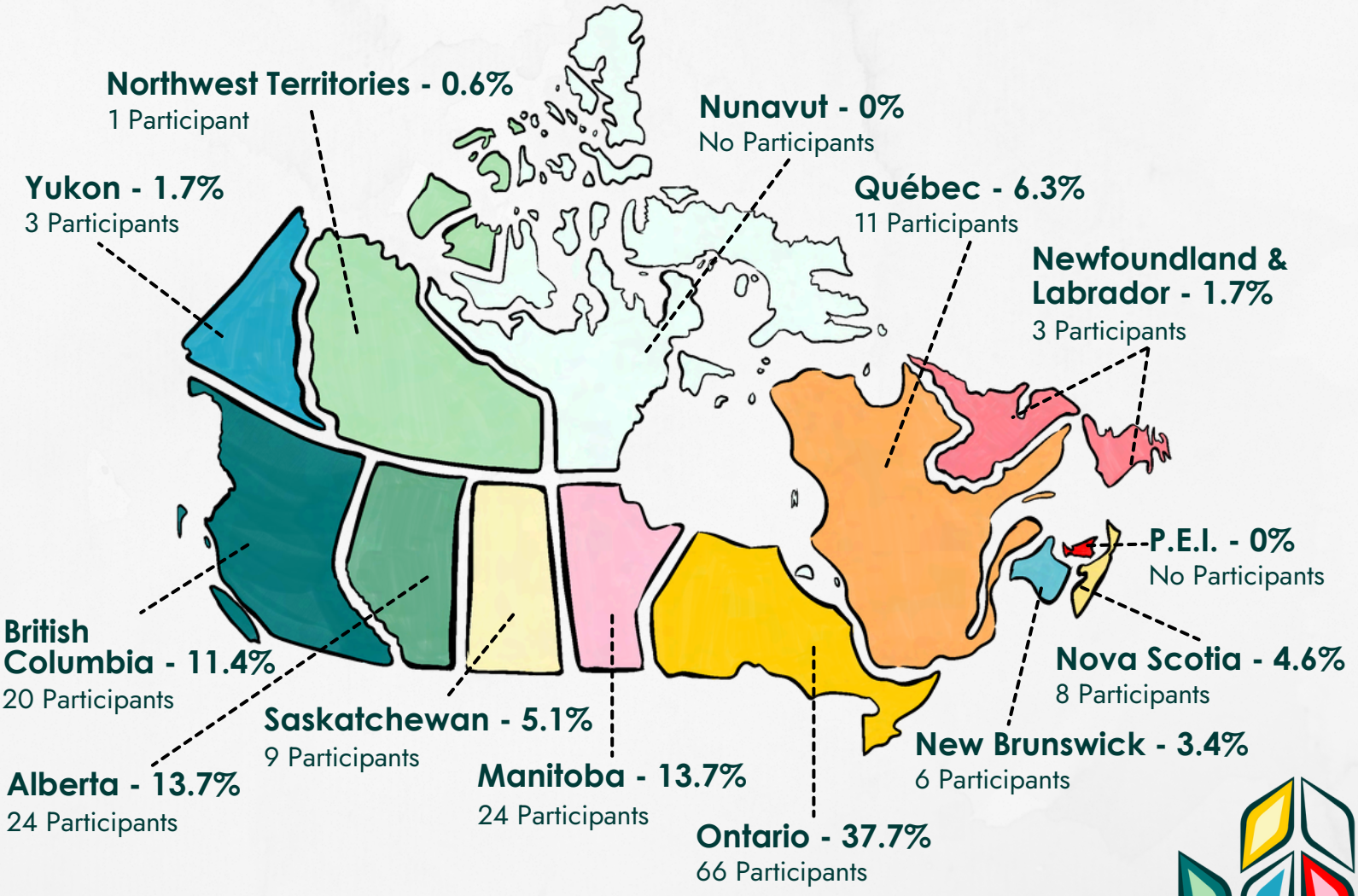
Some context before diving into the genders of the participants in this project: in their demographic form, youth were able to select as many genders as they liked to describe their experience. This resulted in 19 distinct gender categories, which we collapsed into 11 categories to be better able to represent them statistically. Generally speaking, a "+" was added to a label to indicate that the youth identified as this label and others, while a label without a plus indicates that the youth selected only one label to describe their experience of gender. We felt that any further category collapsing would flatten the gender experiences of our participants. We look forward to publishing more specific work about the findings from this project beyond this report, including doing even more in-depth analyses based on the myriad of gender identities of the youth.

In reviewing the genders of the participants, most participants identified as cisgender women (53.2%), followed by cisgender men (18.8%) and Two-Spirit and Two-Spirit+ participants (7.8% each). Non-binary(+) and agender participants make up a total of 3.1% of our participants, and Trans(+) folks making up 2.1%.



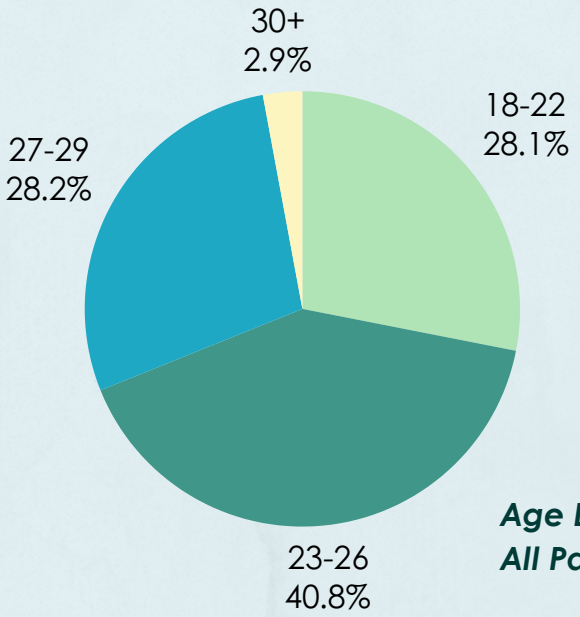
To respond to the lack of data available about Two-Spirit youth experiences and needs in Canada, we've done our best throughout this report to highlight how Two-Spirit youth specifically responded to our questions. In reviewing where the 175 Two-Spirit and Two-Spirit+ youth we spoke to were from, most were from Ontario (37.7%), followed by Alberta (13.7%) and British Columbia (11.4%). The Two-Spirit Participants by Province & Territory Map depicts where Two-Spirit(+) folks are living based on their percentage as a group of 175 and also as a percentage of the full group of participants.

Two-Spirit Participants by Province and Territory



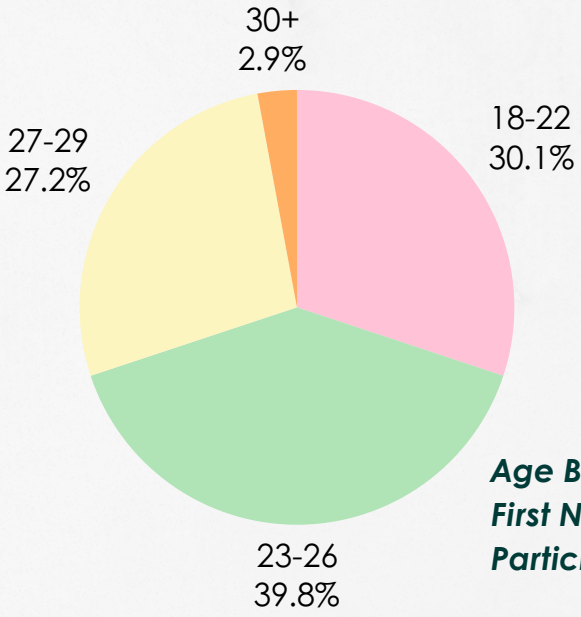
Participant Ages

Most participants we spoke to were in the 23-26 age bracket (42.1%), with an almost even split between the 18-22 age range (28.9%) and the 27-29 age range (28.7%). Please note that although these engagements were restricted to Indigenous youth ages 18-29, there were three participants at our soft launch in Banff who were over the age of 30. These participants were there as part of our National Indigenous Youth Gathering, where they had been invited to participate as youth.



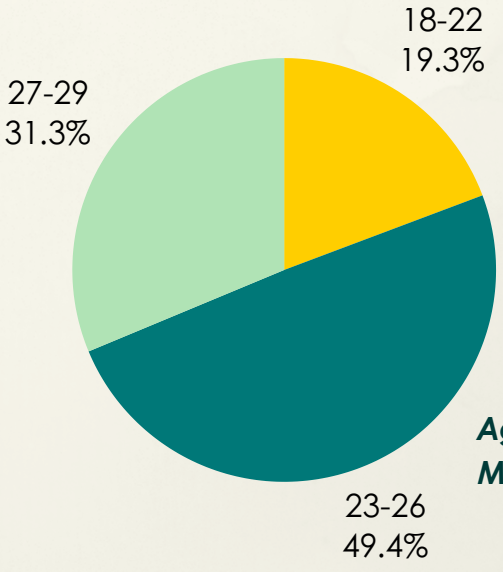
Age Breakdown - All Participants

In looking at how old the First Nations participants we spoke to were, 41% were in the 23-26 age bracket, followed by 31% in the 18-22 age bracket, and 28% in the 27-29 age bracket. The Age Breakdown of First Nations Participants table summarizes this and illustrates these groups as a percentage of the total set of 1,125 participants and as a percentage of the 769 First Nations participants.



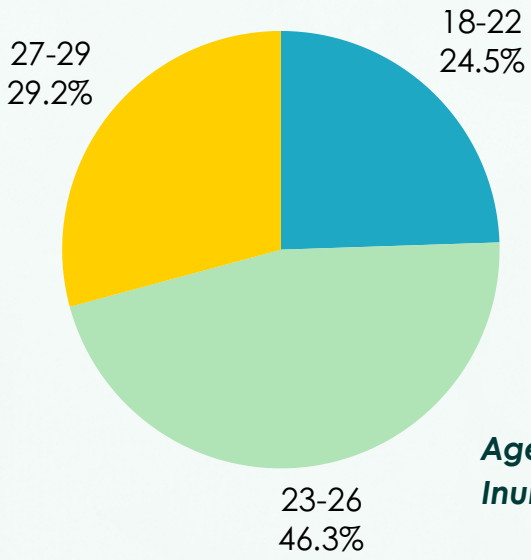
Age Breakdown - First Nations Participants

Almost half (48.9%) of the Métis participants were in the 23-26 age bracket, following by 32% in the 27-29 age bracket, and 19.1% in the 18-22 age bracket.

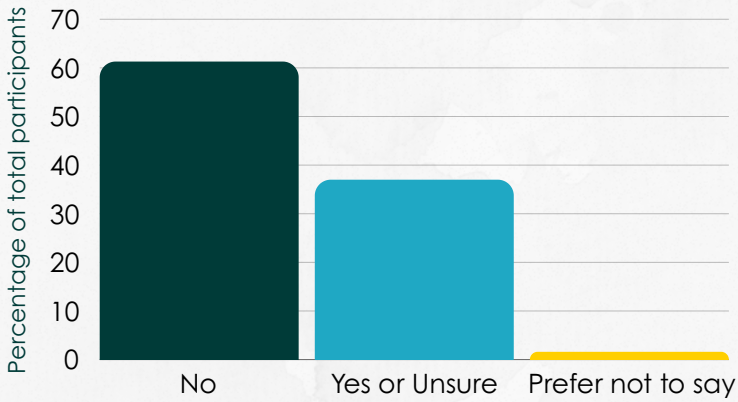


Age Breakdown - Métis Participants

Of the 140 Inuit participants, 46.4% were in the 23-26 age bracket, followed by 29.2% in the 27-29 age bracket, and 24.3% in the 18-22 age bracket.



Age Breakdown - Inuit Participants



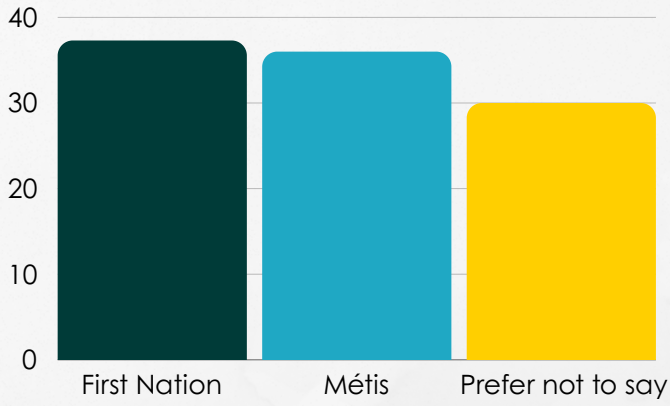
Disability

Across all participants, 37.0% said they are living with or are unsure if they are living with a disability. Of the 416 participants within the "yes or unsure" disability status, 377 said "yes" and 29 said "unsure".

< Disability Status of All Participants

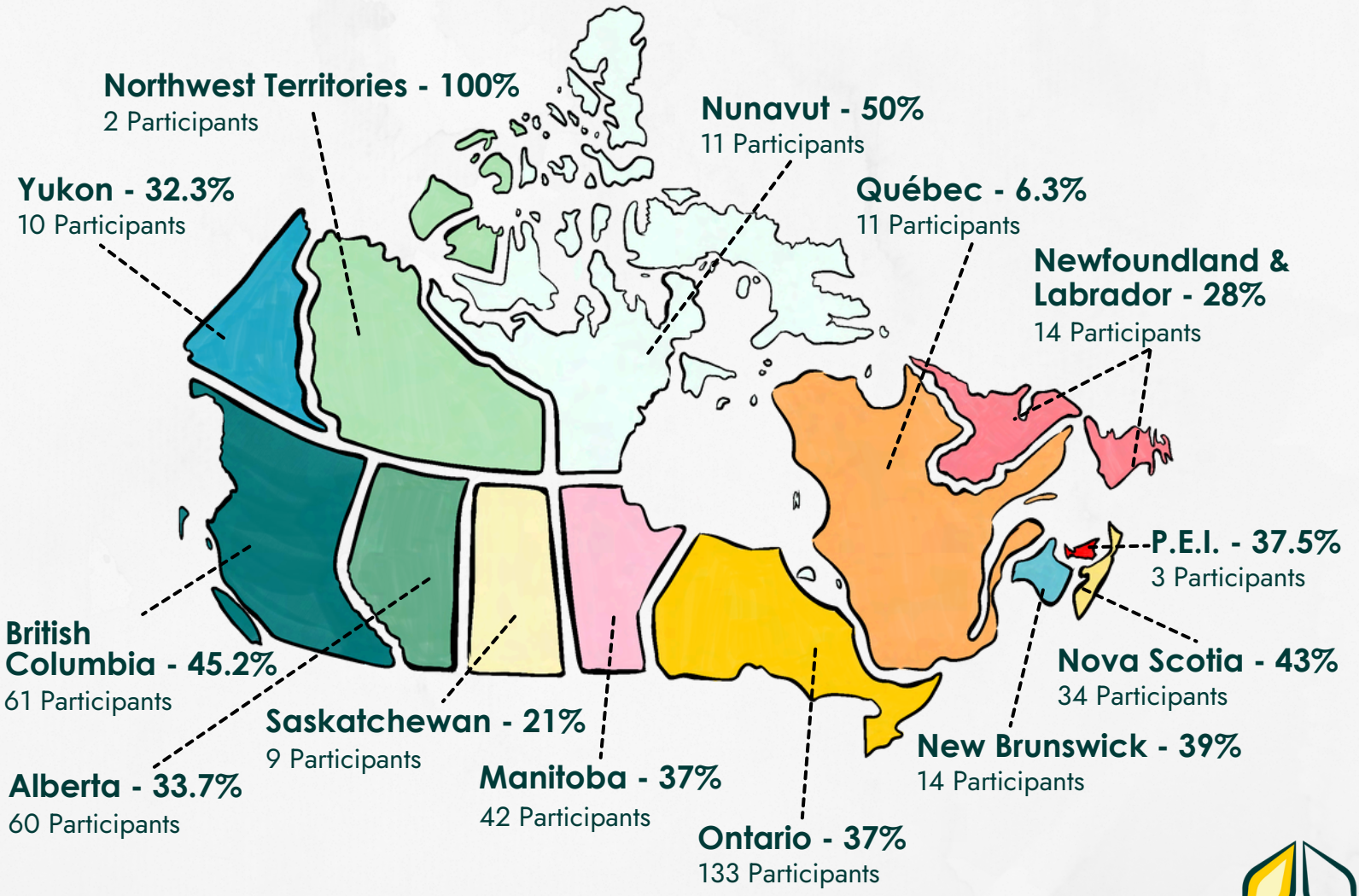
Across all Indigenous identities, the rate of reporting "yes" or "unsure" to the disability status question is between 30-37.3%. Among First Nations participants, 37.3% said they are living with or are unsure if they are living with a disability, compared to 36% of Métis participants, and 30% of Inuit participants.

Participants Living with a Disability by Indigenous Identity >



The province/territory with the greatest percentage of youth living with a disability or youth who were unsure if they were living with a disability was technically the Northwest Territories, with 100% of participants saying they are living with or are unsure if they are living with a disability. However, as can be seen below, there were only two participants from the Northwest Territories. After this, the province/territory with the greatest percentage of youth saying they are living with or are unsure if they are living with a disability was Nunavut (50%), followed by British Columbia (45.2%).

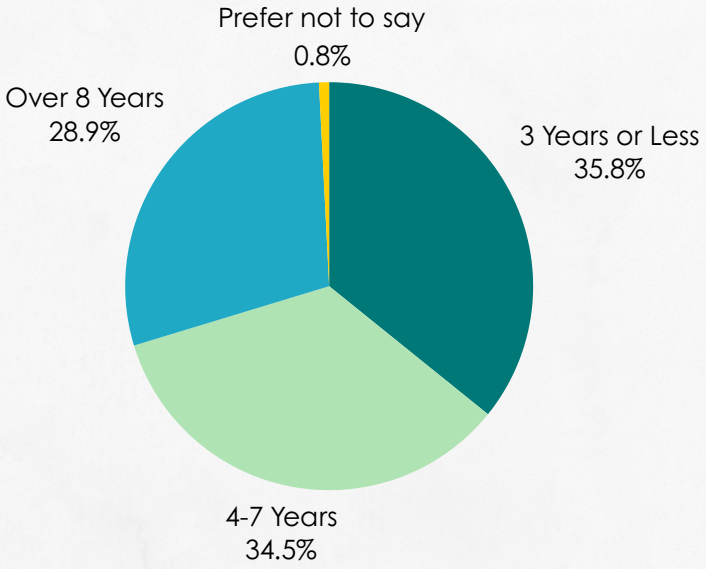
Participants Living With a Disability by Province and Territory



Work and Education Experience

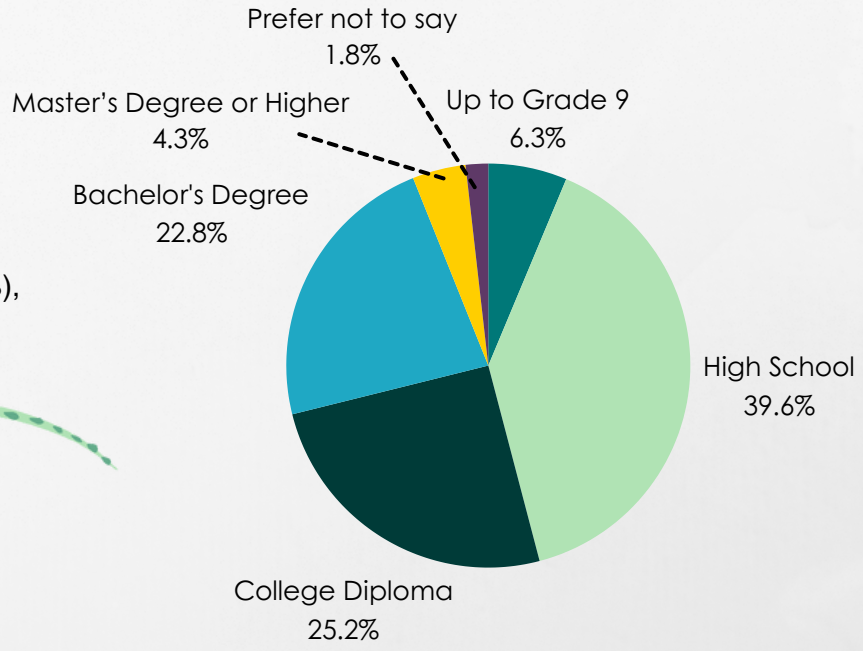
In asking youth how much work experience they had at the time of participating in the project, the largest group of youth said that they had 3 years or less of work experience (35.8%), followed by 4-7 years (34.5%) and 8+ years (28.9%).

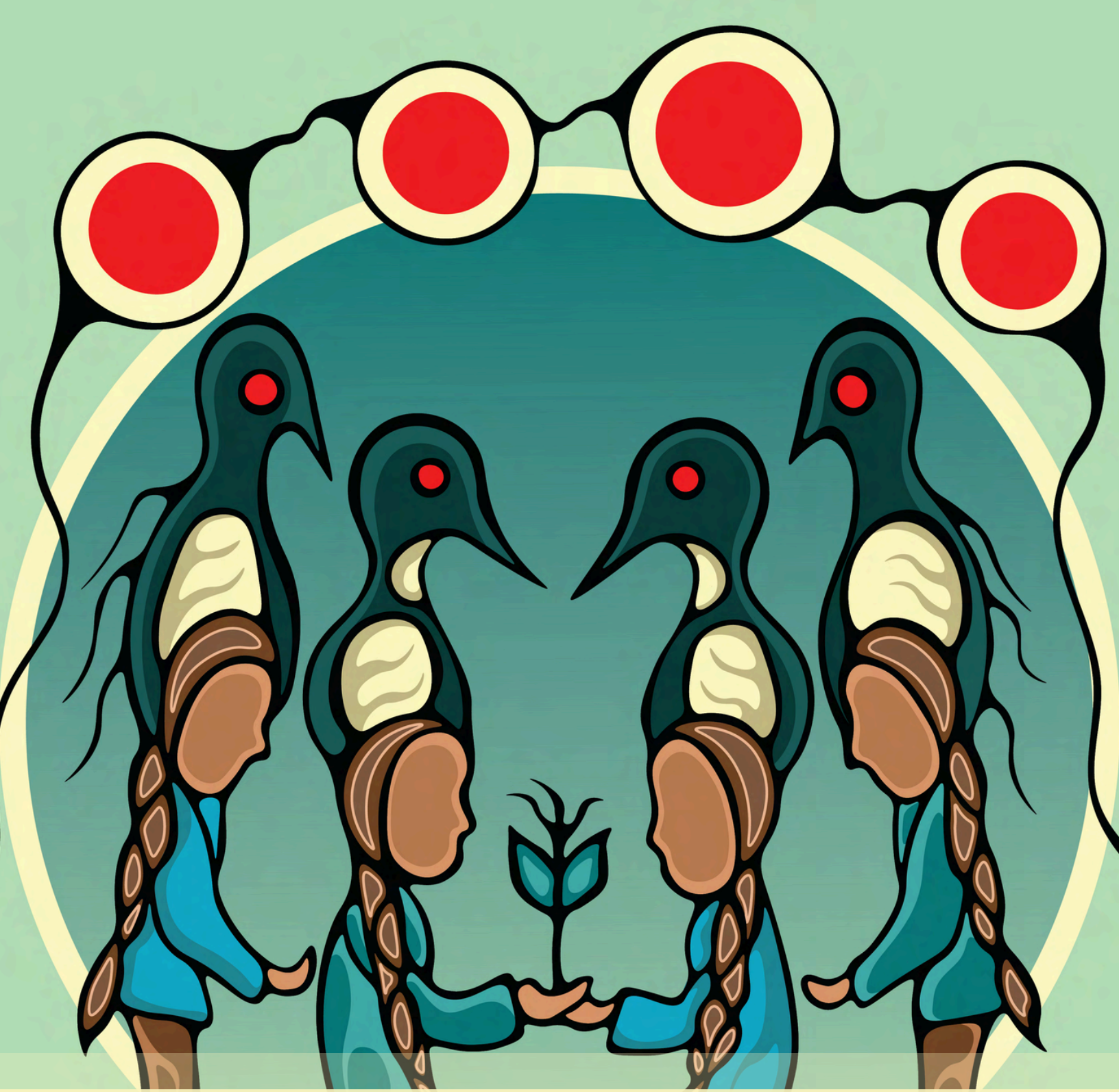
For context, the table below outlines how the years of experience are dispersed based on age.



Years of Experience	Ages 18-22	Ages 23-26	Ages 27-29	30+
3 Years or Less	181	164	58	0
4-7 Years	120	174	94	0
Over 8 Years	20	134	168	3
Prefer not to say	4	2	3	0

In terms of the highest level of education completed, the largest demographic group of participants had achieved up to high school (39.6%), followed by a college diploma (25.2%), then a bachelor's degree (22.8%).





THEME 1

Personal and Community Empowerment

THEME 1

Personal and Community Empowerment

Indigenous Youth Defining Empowerment

One of the first things we wanted to ask Indigenous youth was about the specific life events, activities, relationships, settings, and practices that make them feel empowered and inspired. We also asked them to identify what supports they need to continue to build their sense of empowerment now and into the future. For many youth, their empowerment is deeply rooted in their sense of community and culture, in being on the land with each other, and in seeing their goals fulfilled.

> **I feel empowered every single time I participate in my culture** or share my culture with other Indigenous children and youth. Every time I light a smudge is empowerment, every time I share a story or a teaching is empowerment. Every opportunity I have to speak up for my people and my community is empowerment.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

What makes Indigenous youth feel empowered?

When asked in the survey about what makes them feel empowered, Indigenous youth most frequently said they feel empowered when:

81% Envisioning a good future for themselves and their community

78% Being themselves and respected for who they are

78% Being a role model

78% Seeing the impact of a community-led project

72% Practicing their culture



When looking at how youth responded by Indigenous identity, being able to envision a good future for themselves and their communities continued to be the most frequently agreed to statement across First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth. Here, 82% of First Nations youth agreed, 75% of Inuit youth agreed, and 83% of Métis youth agreed.

For Afro-Indigenous youth, most agreed that being able to be a role model makes them feel empowered, with 80% saying this. This was followed by being able to envision a good future for themselves and their communities, being able to be a role model, and being able to see the impact of a community or community member-led project, with each of these statements having 77% of Afro-Indigenous youth agreeing it makes them feel empowered.

80%

of Afro-Indigenous youth said they feel empowered when they can be a role model

For youth living in urban, rural or remote, and on-reserve community types, being able to envision a good future for themselves and their communities was also the most agreed to statement. Here, 80% of urban youth, 86% of remote or rural youth, and 85% of on-reserve youth agreed this makes them feel empowered. When looking at how youth responded based on the province or territory they live in, some other themes begin to emerge. In each province and territory, youth most frequently agreed that they feel empowered when:

I can envision a good future for myself and my community

- **Newfoundland & Labrador - 82%**
- **British Columbia - 82%**
- **Northwest Territories - 82%**
- **Nova Scotia - 79%**
- **Prince Edward Island - 67%**
- **Ontario - 80%**
- **Alberta - 80%**



I can be a role model

- **Manitoba - 88%**
- **Saskatchewan - 88%**

I voice my opinion and actively participate in discussions

- **Yukon - 82%**

I feel connected spiritually

- **Nunavut - 93%**

I can be myself and am respected for who I am

- **New Brunswick - 91%**

I can see the impact of community or community member-led projects

- **Québec - 90%**

Differences in what makes Indigenous youth feel most empowered are made more visible when looking at how youth responded by gender. Here, transgender men most frequently agreed (91%) that they feel empowered when they are out on the land learning about traditional ways and practices. Additionally, Two-Spirit and Two-Spirit+ youth most frequently agreed that they feel empowered when they can be a role model, with 86% and 83% agreeing, respectively.

When asked to talk about a time that they felt empowered, youth shared stories about participating in and leading ceremonies, being surrounded by and sharing their culture, working with other Indigenous youth and their communities, being accepted for who they are, creating art, finishing their educations, and starting their own businesses, as examples.

I feel empowered when I am with my mother's family.

We are from Namegosibiing which is in Red Lake, Ontario on Treaty 3. I particularly feel empowered when I'm with this family and on the land where we are from. When we can set out nets for fish, boat together, and practice other aspects of our culture together.

-Survey Participant

These sentiments were echoed in the sharing circles when youth were asked what inspires them. Here, many Indigenous youth said that they feel inspired when they can experience their culture, speak and hear their languages, and when they are out on the land. Additionally, seeing Indigenous resilience and resurgence, and seeing Indigenous peoples' presence in diverse spaces, were shared by many as a source of inspiration.

During our sharing circle for youth living in Inuit Nunangat, participants talked about how they felt inspired by Inuit art. Youth also shared that they felt motivated by seeing the hardships their communities have had to endure, saying that it makes them want to work toward their goals for themselves, their communities, and their families.

Many also said that they feel inspired when they can be a role model for other Indigenous youth and help to change the narratives for them. A participant at a Toronto sharing circle talked about feeling inspired by changing the narrative for themselves and wanting to inspire other Afro-Indigenous youth to do the same.

Statistics inspire me. My statistics to graduate high school were low,

and for post-secondary it was low. For me I am the second to graduate high school and the first to finish post-secondary. I want Black Indigenous youth, specifically out of care, to know that despite statistics, you can do it.

-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant



What supports do Indigenous youth need to feel empowered?

When asked about what types of support would best strengthen empowerment for themselves and other Indigenous youth, most agreed that having access to cultural teachings was the most important. This was followed by having access to youth-Elder programs and on-the-land learning, which aligns with 72% of Indigenous youth feeling empowered when they are practicing their culture, as highlighted above. The most selected supports across all Indigenous youth surveyed were:

67% Cultural teachings/learnings

54% On the land learning

41% Youth-Elder programs

38% Language learning opportunities

36% Youth council and other opportunities to be a role model



In addition to the supports mentioned, Inuit and Métis youth said they need more mental and physical wellness supports to help them feel empowered. Inuit youth also uniquely identified needing more opportunities to connect with Indigenous youth from other communities. First Nations youth also said that they need more language learning opportunities.

Indigenous Identity	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
First Nations	Cultural teachings & learnings	On the land learning	Youth-Elder Programs	Language learning opportunities	Youth council and opportunities to be a role model
Inuit	Cultural teachings & learnings	On the land learning	Youth-Elder Programs	Mental and physical wellness supports	Opportunities to connect with Indigenous youth from other communities
Métis	Cultural teachings & learnings	Youth-Elder Programs	Mental and physical wellness supports	On the land learning	Mentorship

When looking specifically at responses from Two-Spirit youth, having access to cultural teachings and learnings was the most selected response. At the same time, Two-Spirit youth identified having more programming spaces for Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ youth as another top support needed to bolster their sense of empowerment.

Breaking down the responses by province and territory shows additional supports Indigenous youth need based on location. While youth in most provinces and territories responded in a relatively uniform way, youth from the Northwest Territories and Prince Edward Island identified also needing arts programs and access to climate justice and environmental advocacy programming in addition to things like access to cultural teachings and youth-Elder programs.

Additionally, youth living with a disability identified the need for more mental and physical wellness supports, which was not in the top five most important supports needed for youth who are not living with a disability. Necessary supports based on disability status are further outlined below.

Youth living with disabilities were more likely to report needing mental and physical wellness supports to help them feel empowered.

Disability Status	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
No	Cultural teachings & learnings	On the land learning	Youth-Elder Programs	Language learning opportunities	Youth council and opportunities to be a role model
Yes/Unsure	Cultural teachings & learnings	On the land learning	Youth-Elder Programs	Mental and physical wellness supports	More programming and spaces for Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ youth
Prefer not to say	Cultural teachings & learnings	On the land learning	Arts and craft-related programs	Mental and physical wellness supports	Mentorship

Indigenous Youth Setting Goals

As part of understanding the kinds of futures Indigenous youth are building for themselves and for their communities, we asked about what goals they have, how they see themselves getting there, and what inspires them to chase their goals. By communicating this, we also learned more about the barriers they face in achieving their goals, and how those barriers impact their lives now and into the future. Through these conversations, youth most frequently talked about wanting to live a healthy and balanced life, strengthening community and cultural connections, and being able to support themselves and their families financially.

> **Sustainability.**
>
> Being able to have my own place with my little family. Housing that people could own in the future. Healthy lands and our people could be happy
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant*

What goals do Indigenous youth have for their futures?

In the survey, when asked what the important goals Indigenous youth have for themselves in their lifetime are the most selected responses were:

74% Living a balanced life (mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically)

49% Strengthening my connection to and knowledge of my culture

48% Being happy and healthy regardless of where the road takes me

39% Being financially self-sufficient

34% Contributing to the growth and empowerment of my community

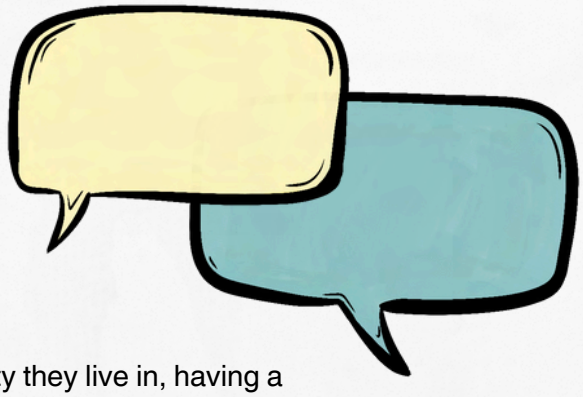
2019 Barometer Comparison

Comparatively, in the 2019 Barometer, Indigenous youth identified career achievements or attaining a specific type of job as their top lifetime goal, followed by building a family, owning a home or land, attaining an education, and achieving financial security. Youth in the 2019 Barometer were also asked to describe their idea of "the good life" by assessing the importance of a range of factors. In looking at their overall responses, the top 5 most selected "very important" factors were:

- *Financial independence (74%)*
- *Raising healthy and well-adjusted children (74%)*
- *Having a good job or successful career (74%)*
- *Living a balanced life (74%)*
- *Being connected to your community or homeland (50%)*

Notably, Inuit participants from the 2019 Barometer placed more importance on financial independence than their First Nations and Métis peers, as did youth living on-reserve and youth living in the Atlantic provinces. Overall though, Indigenous youth in the 2019 Barometer put more importance on financial independence than the youth in the 2024 Barometer project.

For First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth, living a balanced life, strengthening connection to culture, being happy and healthy, and being financially self-sufficient were consistently the top 3 goals. However, learning their language was also an important goal for First Nations youth specifically – this aligns with our conversation about empowerment in the previous section, where First Nations youth were more likely to point out needing more language learning opportunities to support their empowerment.



When looking at how youth responded based on the type of community they live in, having a successful career was noted as an important goal for urban Indigenous youth. Youth living in rural or remote areas and youth living on-reserve identified being able to contribute positively to the health of the land, water, and animals in their community as one of their most important lifetime goals. A breakdown of the responses from youth living in each community type is outlined below.

Geographic Type	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Urban	Living a balanced life (mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically)	Strengthening my connection to and knowledge of my culture	Being healthy and happy regardless of where the road takes me	Being financially self-sufficient	Having a successful career or job
Remote or Rural	Living a balanced life (mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically)	Being healthy and happy regardless of where the road takes me	Strengthening my connection to and knowledge of my culture	Being financially self-sufficient	Contributing positively to the health of the land, water and animals in my community
On-Reserve	Living a balanced life (mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically)	Strengthening my connection to and knowledge of my culture	Learning my language(s)	Being financially self-sufficient	Contributing to the growth and empowerment of my community

In thinking about their futures, youth who attended our sharing circles talked about their goals of completing secondary or post-secondary education, making a difference in their communities, gaining meaningful employment, and securing safe and affordable housing. Throughout the sharing circles, youth often talked about wanting to live a safe, healthy and balanced life - and wanting to see their families and communities doing the same. These sentiments were echoed by the youth who filled out the survey when they were asked to share any other goals they have for the future, outside of the goals listed previously.

> **"The main thing that I envision is me being healthy and being able to help my community also be healthy.**
>
> Probably also the ability to live surrounded by my culture would be incredible. I grew up in an urban setting because my dad wanted me to have access to education. On reserve it was harder to get access to that. If I could somehow take the opportunities I got and give that back to folks in rural areas, I would feel that I achieved the goals in my life."
>
> *-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant*

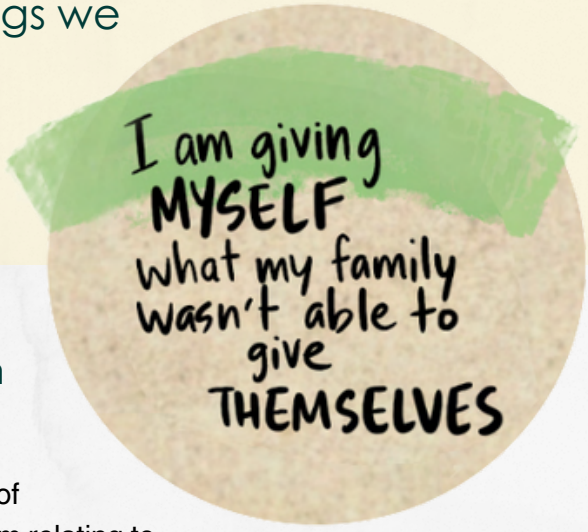
Many also said they want to overcome intergenerational trauma and emphasized the importance of having goals that will help break the trauma cycle. During our sharing circle for youth living on-reserve, a participant shared about the importance of constant internal work to overcome trauma not only for themselves, but for their children.

> **"I would like to own a home**
>
> so that I always have a place to be, and no one can take it away from me. A place to keep my family and loved ones safe and sheltered."
>
> *-Survey Participant*



Because our parents went to residential school

> [...] opening up and having an open dialogue [with them] and being truthful and honest [with our children] isn't usual in our community due to residential school trauma, and how we can heal and give[children] the things we didn't have...and make sure it's a safe place for them to be.
>
> *-Online On-Reserve Sharing Circle Participant*



What barriers are in the way of Indigenous youth achieving their goals?

In the sharing circles, we asked youth what barriers were in the way of achieving their goals. Here, youth identified many barriers facing them relating to health and wellbeing, infrastructure and services (or lack of), lack of safe and quality community supports, and systemic and structural barriers.

Barriers	Examples
Barriers related to health and wellbeing	• Mental health issues (e.g., anxiety, depression) • Feelings of self-doubt and struggling with self-confidence • Lack of mental health resources and support for healing • Pressures to break intergenerational trauma cycles • Being away from family and community for education or work • Financial anxiety and uncertainty about the future
Barriers related to infrastructure and services	• Lack of childcare support for young parents (in terms of both cost and accessibility) • Limited support for Indigenous students to support them to succeed in education • Lack of safe and affordable housing, schools, transportation, drinking water services in communities

> **How can you invest in your community when you are not even sure you can make it to your next paycheque?**
>
> *-Survey Participant*

Barriers	Examples
Barriers related to community support	• Power imbalances and politics within communities resulting in nepotism and favoritism • Lateral violence • Lack of unity among community members • Lack of access to Elders and Indigenous mentors, especially for youth living in urban areas • Lack of support for Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth in accessing cultural and language programs
Systemic and structural barriers	• Racism, misogyny, and stereotyping • Growing up in poverty • High cost of living and unstable job market • Conflicting personal and professional priorities (difficulty finding time for family, community and culture when working traditional 9 to 5 jobs) • Lack of or limited representation of Indigenous peoples in leadership roles • Stringent criteria to be eligible for programs, funding, and jobs (e.g., looking at degree vs. looking at experience) • Limited funding to support positions within the communities, resulting in burn out • Limited educational and career opportunities in remote and northern communities

The lack of access to safe and affordable housing and services were felt heavily by youth living in rural, remote and on-reserve areas, particularly in more northern areas and across Inuit Nunangat. As said by one youth in the Inuit Nunangat online sharing circle “there’s not many or any safe spaces for us.” These barriers were discussed extensively within the sharing circles and echoed by many in the survey when youth were asked to talk about what is in the way of achieving their goals. Often, in the sharing circles and survey, lack of housing and services was cited alongside financial barriers.



The cost of housing in the Northwest Territories has become untenable.

I currently work full-time… in addition to full-time school, and even with those two I still cannot afford my own apartment or housing situation here in Yellowknife. Overcrowding is a big issue here in the North.

-Survey Participant

Many youth also discussed feeling high financial anxiety when pursuing goals such as educational opportunities, saying that they would have to make sacrifices to do so. Youth who talked about wanting to pursue further education brought up things like having to work multiple jobs to pay for their tuition and living expenses and not being able to afford post-secondary education due to not being able to access adequate funding through their communities. Across the sharing circles and the survey, the cost of living and finances generally were discussed heavily as a barrier.



2019 Barometer Comparison

In talking about the biggest challenges they face to achieving their goals, 46% of Indigenous youth who participated in the 2019 Barometer cited money and financial barriers while 25% cited mental health and emotional challenges (including but not limited to depression, anxiety, motivation, and lack of confidence). Indigenous women were also much more likely to cite money as a barrier (56% as compared to 37% for Indigenous men), as were participants from BC and the Atlantic provinces.

In the sharing circles and the survey, some Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ youth brought up feeling unwelcomed or unsupported by their communities, saying that there is a lack of known safe spaces for them. Many participants also voiced feeling as though there are power imbalances in their communities, which has led to services and programs not being accessible to everyone. A lack of accountability in some communities was also cited as a barrier to some youth achieving their goals.

There are two main barriers in finances and an unwelcoming environment to Two-Spirit individuals.

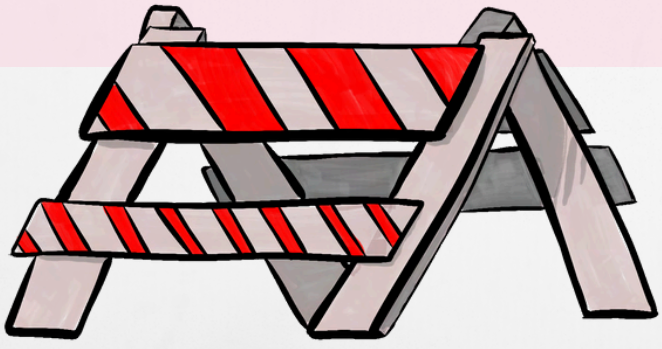
The financial aspect definitely limits my ability and capacity to work towards these goals, as a significant portion of my time and energy is making sure that my housing, bills, and necessities are secured. As an openly Two-Spirit individual, there can be limited offering of opportunities that openly advertise themselves as safe for Two-Spirit/queer/trans people. It's definitely played a part in my reluctance to participate in opportunities when it isn't openly advertised.

-Survey Participant

Funding and time mainly, but also sometimes it's my identity and disabilities.

I have created spaces that are Two-Spirit friendly and am making spaces as accessible as I can but it's hard going into space that don't consider those things, like in ceremony, and feeling like I don't have a place there.

-Survey Participant



What supports do Indigenous youth need to achieve these goals?

In the survey, we asked Indigenous youth what their top five sources of motivation are in setting and achieving their goals. The most selected responses across all Indigenous youth surveyed were:

68% Support from family and friends

68% Believing in myself

60% Having good mentors or role models to guide me

59% Access to services and resources

57% Having financial support



When looking at how youth with different Indigenous identities responded, support from family and friends, believing in oneself, having good role models, and access to services and resources were common responses between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth. However, Métis youth additionally emphasized having financial support as a motivator, and Inuit youth identified having a connection to culture and/or spirituality as one of their top sources of motivation.

2019 Barometer Comparison

Indigenous youth who participated in the 2019 Barometer cited the following as their key sources of hope and confidence in being able to achieve their goals:

- *Personal drive - 27% (including determination, work ethic, spirituality, believing in themselves)*
- *Support from others - 27% (including family and friend support)*

A smaller number of participants also cited education and getting a degree as a source of confidence (7%). Indigenous women and Métis individuals were overall more likely to cite support from others as a source of hope and confidence. Notably, a large number did not answer (18%) or could not say (18%).

Looking at the responses by gender shows similar motivators between all genders, as does looking at the responses by province or territory and by community type (urban, remote or rural, or on-reserve). However, Two-Spirit youth more frequently identified having a connection to culture and/or spirituality as a source of motivation. Additionally, transgender youth and Two-Spirit+ youth more frequently highlighted that having their authentic selves be seen, supported, and loved is a source of motivation for them.

Youth who identified as living with a disability more frequently identified financial support as an important source of motivation than youth who did not identify that way. Here, financial support was overall the third most important motivator for Indigenous youth living with a disability, compared to fifth for those not living with one. Afro-Indigenous youth were also more likely to say that financial support was an important source of motivation for them, with 70% saying this. For Afro-Indigenous youth, this was the most frequently cited source of motivation.

Top Supports Needed by Disability Status

Disability Status	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
No	Believing in myself	Support from my family and friends	Having good mentors or role models to guide me	Access to services and resources	Having financial support
Yes/Unsure	Support from my family and friends	Access to services and resources	Having financial support	Having good mentors or role models to guide me	Connection to my culture and/or spirituality
Prefer not to say	Having financial support	Support from my family and friends	Connection to my culture and/or spirituality	Having good mentors or role models to guide me	Having my authentic self be seen, supported, and loved

In the sharing circles, youth in urban areas highlighted the need for more safe spaces like Friendship Centres. For many Indigenous youth, Friendship Centres are an important place to access resources and make connections with others. Youth in rural, remote, or on-reserve areas talked frequently about the need for better infrastructure and services in their communities, such as safe and affordable housing and access to reliable internet connections. For some youth in these areas, the lack of infrastructure and services has made it difficult to access resources that they need not only to work toward their goals, but to feel safe generally.

Youth in urban areas highlighted the need for more safe spaces like Friendship Centres.



I would like to see my community gain access to more affordable, secure, clean and healthy houses, enough for everyone.

I think for families, it can be really important to have a place that you own so that you know nobody can take away the stability and safety of your family. For single parents and folks in abusive situations, being able to create your own home means that you have a stronger case to keep your children and protect them from harm.

-Survey Participant

Also, needing more financial supports and mentoring opportunities for youth who want to start their own businesses was identified, with some youth saying they would like to see relevant information for Indigenous youth on investing, applying for business grants, and financial literacy. Overall, most Indigenous youth felt that having relevant support – whether that be financial, through access to services, or through emotional support - from their communities was important for them to feel like they can achieve their goals.

Indigenous Youth in Their Communities

To better understand Indigenous youth community-building today and into the future, we asked Indigenous youth to define their idea of community, to identify the strengths they see in their communities, and to talk about what makes them feel connected to their communities. We also asked them to identify specific programs, resources, and supports that would strengthen youth empowerment in their communities. Finally, we asked them to envision their communities in the short term (5-10 years from now) and generations from now.

LANGUAGE NOTE

In asking youth these questions about community, we suggested they could speak to their home community or city they are from, the community or city they live in, or any combination of those.

> **Community is made up of different people coming together to support each other.**
>
> In community, we are parts of a greater whole. We are a circle where everyone has a say and nobody is excluded or left to suffer alone. We come together for common goals and great things happen because we all have our parts to play.
>
> *-Survey Participant*



How do Indigenous youth define community and community strengths?

Across our in-person discussions and online survey, youth we spoke to clearly illustrated just how expansive and generous the concept of community can be. Many youth's definitions of community were rooted in relationships and belongings, while others felt that their sense of community is more tied to specific places. One youth in the Whitehorse Sharing Circle shared that moving around a lot and living nomadically aligned with their Métis identity and strengthened their connection to their Métis identity.

For many youth living in these urban areas, community is shaped by the relationships they've built. Youth also used words like safety, comfort, unity, support, and belonging in articulating their definitions of community. They spoke of the importance of shared land, shared traditions, shared languages, and mutual care.

> **As an urban Indigenous person, community is not feeling like you belong to a specific place,** but having a sense of belonging within the community that you've built.
>
> *-Halifax Sharing Circle Participant (paraphrased)*

> **All my relations. We hold uplift and support one another, hold each other accountable, learn from mistakes and grow together.**
> No one should be left behind in suffer in community and all voices should be heard, especially the most marginalized in our communities.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

> **Community is a group of people that you claim or claims you.**
> [It] doesn't have to be your own Nation, can be the LGTBQ one or just the general Indigenous one.
>
> *-Montréal Sharing Circle Participant (Paraphrased)*

> **For me, community is a relationship with reciprocal trust, respect, and love.**
> In community each member is responsible for their own well-being and the wellbeing of the community at large.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

During our East Coast Online Sharing Circle, one youth described community as a shifting and evolving concept that changes with you:

> **Community for me can be family, friends, a neighborhood, or a group of people with something in common like the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community.**
>
> Community can be but doesn't need to be tied to where you live. Sometimes it's your roots and where you come from, the community you call home or come back to. Other times it's strangers who become your family and become your home. It can be folks in the same place where you are, and it can also be folks all across the world who respect you, support you, and stand with you.
>
> *-East Coast Sharing Circle Participant*

When asked to speak about their community's greatest strengths, youth who filled out the survey gave a wholistic picture of everything that they value most about their community, as outlined below.

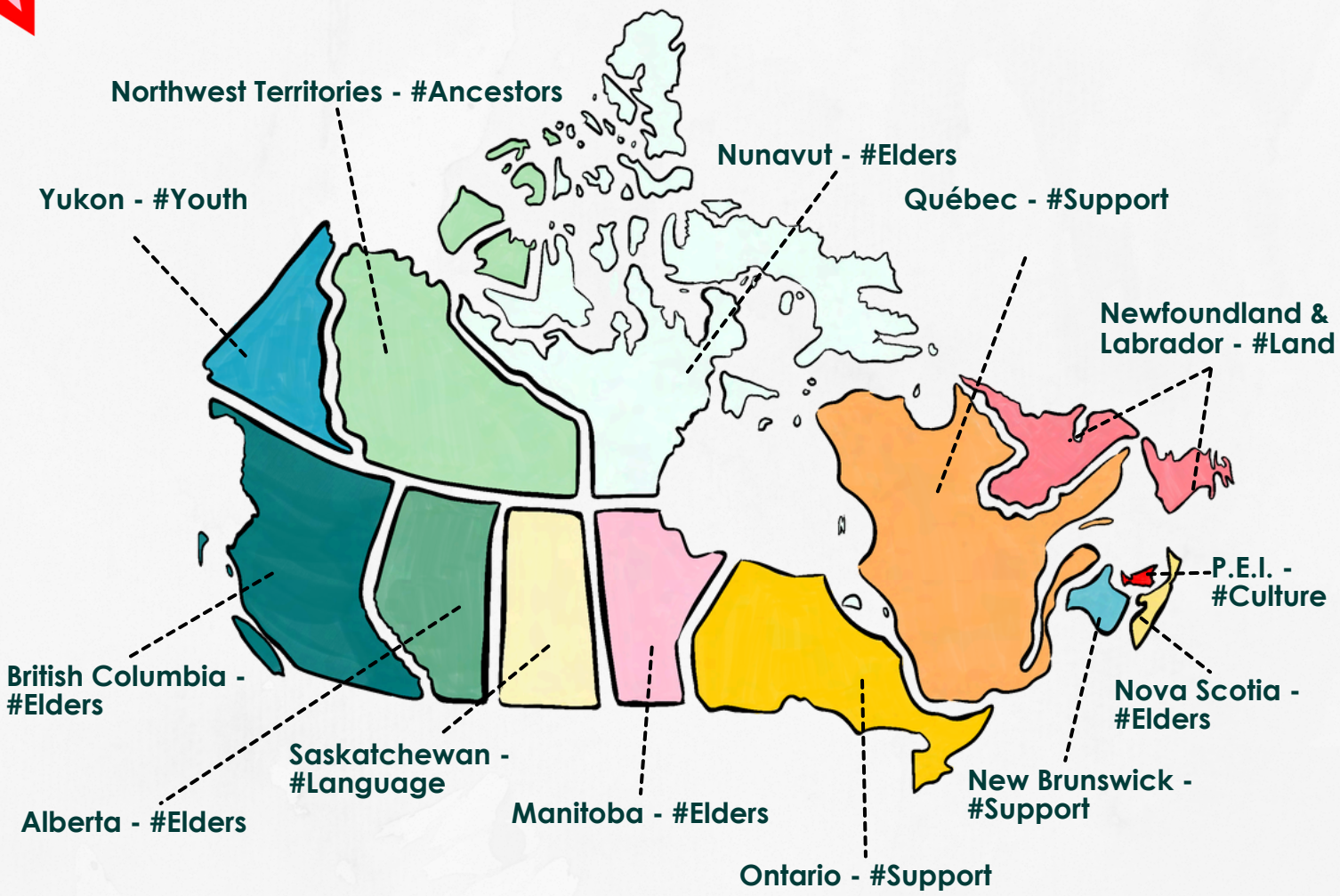
Top community strengths identified by youth



- Leadership and presence of Elders
- Feelings of mutual care, support, connection, and safety
- Access to regular ceremonies, festivals, celebrations
- Access to land and land-based activities (camping, harvesting, hunting, etc.)
- Language retention and transmission
- Active youth engagement and leadership



Top Community Strength #Mentions by Province & Territory



MÉTIS YOUTH
#Support
#Event(s)

FIRST NATIONS YOUTH
#Elders
#Language

INUIT YOUTH
#Elders
#Land

YOUTH LIVING IN URBAN AREAS
#Support
#Elders

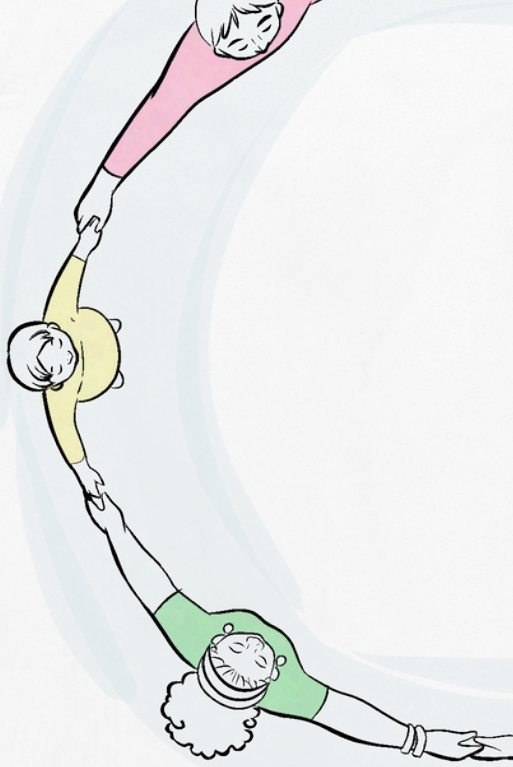
YOUTH LIVING IN REMOTE & RURAL AREAS
#Elders
#Land

YOUTH LIVING ON-RESERVE
#Elders
#Language

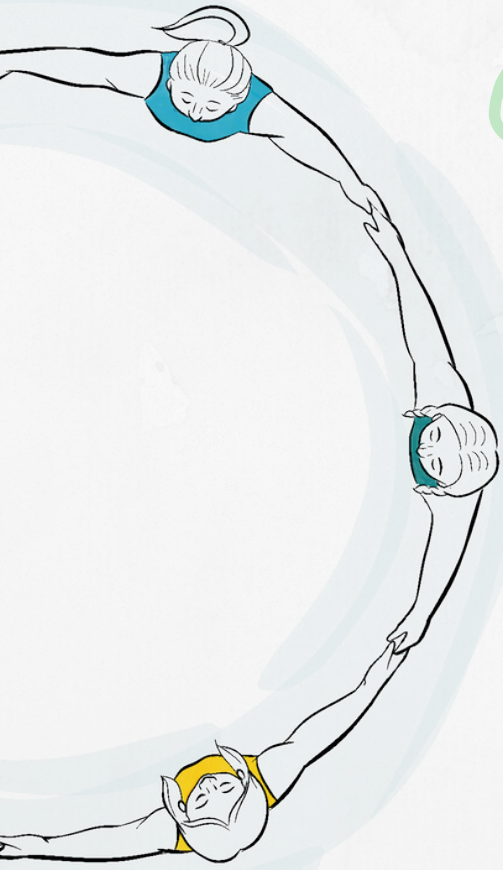
YOUTH LIVING WITH DISABILITIES
#Elders
#Support

TWO-SPIRIT AND LGBTQQIA+ YOUTH
#Elders
#Language

Survey participants similarly expressed how access to programs and services is integral to their sense of community and belonging. Practices like gifting, language learning, trading, and eating and cooking together were also identified as hallmarks of community living. Youth also frequently brought up how important Elder connection and support is to their sense of community.



> **Akwesasne is a very close knit and strong community.**
>
> We have so many programs to help a lot of people within the community. We have programs for breastfeeding mothers, helping Elders get groceries, helping adults get to school and even to help clean our waters.
>
> *-Survey Participant*



> **Elders, community events, connection to the land and my culture,**
>
> the fact that the Métis (where I'm a citizen) society helps so much with many different programs to learn about our culture.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

How do Indigenous youth experience community connection?

In exploring what makes them feel connected to their communities, youth stressed the importance of gatherings, whether to celebrate an occasion or to support each other during challenging times. For example, one person at the Whitehorse Sharing Circle shared that when communities gather for the Adäka Cultural Festival, they experience a sense of belonging and feel connected to their culture and people. Another youth at the Halifax Sharing Circle talked about how they've seen people come together as a Nova Scotian community to help one another during difficult times such as natural disasters, and that helping one another get through these times without any expectations helped them feel connected to the Nova Scotian community as a whole.

Many youth also said that shared cultural practices and traditions are an important anchor to their sense of community. This could include being able to speak their languages, go out on the land, camp, participate in ceremonies, bead, and dance.

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For urban Indigenous youth, having access to inclusive spaces such as Friendship Centres was important in building a community and sense of belonging, particularly after moving away from home. Youth living away from their home communities also talked about how social media helps them maintain relationships and to stay up to date with the events happening at home. When asked to share about the spaces they know of where they live that help support cultural connection, 27% of youth in the survey mentioned Friendship Centres, Indigenous student centres, or community centres. When looking at how urban youth responded, 8% mentioned a Friendship Centre where they live.

> **"I have a community of BIPOC besties and urban ndns.**
>
> I think the level of safety, family-like support, patience, respect, and connection to self/land are what makes me feel supported. And of course the gifting, language practicing, feeding of each other, trading beading supplies and goods, and offering emotional, spiritual, mental, physical support."
>
> *-Survey Participant*

> **"Our queer and Two-Spirit community is vibrant.**
>
> Voices are stirring in major institutions in support of up-and-coming Indigenous scholars. There are efforts being made regardless of the weight being thrown against their progress."
>
> *-Survey Participant*

In the survey, overall, Indigenous youth felt most connected to their communities through participating in community activities and ceremonial practices. The top five most selected activities across all Indigenous youth were:

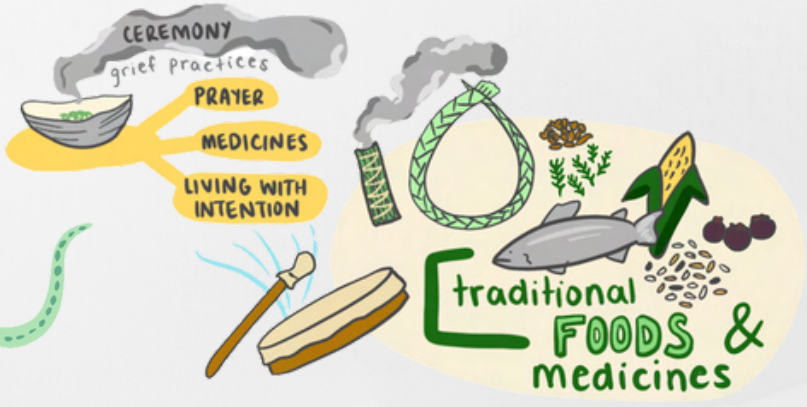
49% Participating in community and ceremonial activities/practices

47% Being accepted in my community

42% Going out on the land

42% Learning from and spending time with Elders

35% Being able to speak my ancestral language



These top five points of connection largely held true across a range of demographic factors, including Indigenous identity, province/territory, gender identity, Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ status, disability status, and community type. In looking at differences across demographics, Inuit youth and Métis youth included Learning from and spending time with Elders in their top 3, while First Nations youth did not. Inuit youth also identified going out on the land as a mode of connection that ranked higher than First Nations and Métis youth.

What makes you feel connected to your community?

FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

1. Participating in community and ceremonial activities & practices
2. Being accepted in my community
3. Going out on the land

MÉTIS YOUTH

1. Being accepted in my community
2. Participating in community and ceremonial activities/practices
3. Learning from and spending time with Elders

INUIT YOUTH

1. Being accepted in my community
2. Going out on the land
3. Learning from and spending time with Elders

TWO-SPIRIT AND LGBTQQIA+

1. Participating in community and ceremonial activities/practices
2. Being accepted in my community
3. Going out on the land

YOUTH LIVING W/ DISABILITIES

1. Participating in community and ceremonial activities/practices
2. Being accepted in my community
3. Going out on the land

#1 ANSWER BY GEOGRAPHIC TYPE

- URBAN: Participating in community and ceremonial activities & practices
- REMOTE/RURAL: Going out on the land
- ON-RESERVE: Participating in community and ceremonial activities & practices

#1 ANSWER BY GENDER

- TWO-SPIRIT: Going out on the land
- TWO-SPIRIT+, CIS+, CIS MEN, CIS WOMEN, TRANS MEN, TRANS WOMEN: Participating in community and ceremonial activities/ practices
- NON-BINARY/AGENDER: Being accepted in my community
- NON-BINARY+: Being able to learn and speak my ancestral language
- TRANSGENDER+: Beading





How do Indigenous youth experience disconnection from their communities?

Discussing connection and barriers to connection naturally led youth to share how their experiences of disconnection manifest emotionally, spiritually, and practically. One youth in the Toronto Sharing Circle shared that part of being in community meant carrying out certain duties and responsibilities, but that past traumas can make it hard to carry out those duties, which then creates a sense of disconnection.

Another youth in the Montréal Sharing Circle felt that while they still felt some connection to their home community, they experienced the tension and stress of feeling like you have abandoned the community by leaving, a feeling echoed by many other youth. Echoing earlier conversations about barriers to achieving their goals, many participants indicated that band politics and internal power imbalances made it difficult to feel connected to their home communities. They shared about the difficulty of finding the balance between connecting with their culture and community while healing from intergenerational trauma.

Youth identified that other facets of their identity can sometimes result in disconnection from their Indigenous community practices. One youth in the Montréal Sharing Circle shared their experience of participating in Sweat Lodge as a Two-Spirit person, where they had to wear a skirt and sit with the women, making them less inclined to participate in ceremonies. While they did acknowledge that discrimination against Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ peoples within community is changing, they noted that some communities maintain strict rules and restrictions that can create an unsafe environment for those youth and discourage them from reconnecting to their community.

> **“There is no textbook to teach you how to connect** with a community or to teach a specific teaching from our community.”
>
> *-Online On-Reserve Sharing Circle Participant*

How do Indigenous youth envision their communities' futures?



We asked youth what their vision is for the future of their communities, 5-10 years down the line, and also generations from now. In their responses, youth spoke about building up every aspect of community living, especially:

- Access to educational facilities
- Access to safe and affordable housing
- Support centres for Elders
- Sport and recreational centres
- Inclusion, acceptance, and care for all Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ community members
- Equal access to quality infrastructure (roads, electricity, transportation, internet)
- Access to all essential services in their communities, including health care, dental care, vision care, and mental health services
- Healing from addictions and lateral violence Increase of accessible spaces for community members with disabilities
- Food security for Indigenous communities (e.g., having community gardens, better food pricing, hunting, and harvesting)
- More Friendship Centres in urban areas

Across demographics, youth are envisioning their communities to be sovereign, rooted in traditional teachings and systems of governance, with quality infrastructure and services. Notably through all of this, they also envision Elders being cared for, Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth being welcomed into the community fabric, and youth empowered to lead. 71% of youth said they felt optimistic about these changes.

> **Healthy and well - alive and thriving.**
>
> Higher life expectancies, lower suicide rates, less chronic illness, and receiving and accessing mental health services. Represented well in all aspects of government – youth are leading the way in terms of leadership, politics and worldview. More formal education. Recognition and support of Indigenous ways of knowing/ being/thinking as education. More cultural aspects available.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

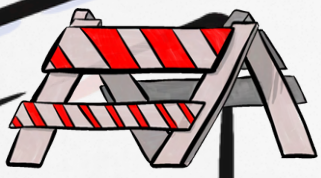
> **I would like for the younger generations to learn and speak fluently in Inuktitut.**
>
> There aren't many inuktitut speakers left, primarily the elders that know and understand the language. It would be a great loss if the generations to come if our native language was left in the past. It is a big part of our culture that was taken away from us, we should not let it die out completely.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

TAKEAWAYS:

PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

STRENGTHS

- Community as a concept is generous and expansive. It can be relationship and/or kinship-based, it can be specific to a place but doesn't have to be. Community is about comfort, safety, unity, support, belonging
- Indigenous youth often look to their peers and communities as a source of motivation and support
- Friendship Centres are important spaces for Indigenous youth to connect and access supports
- Overall, youth feel optimistic about the future of their communities (71%)
- Youth value their Elder's knowledge, presence, leadership, and support
- Practicing their culture binds youth to their communities





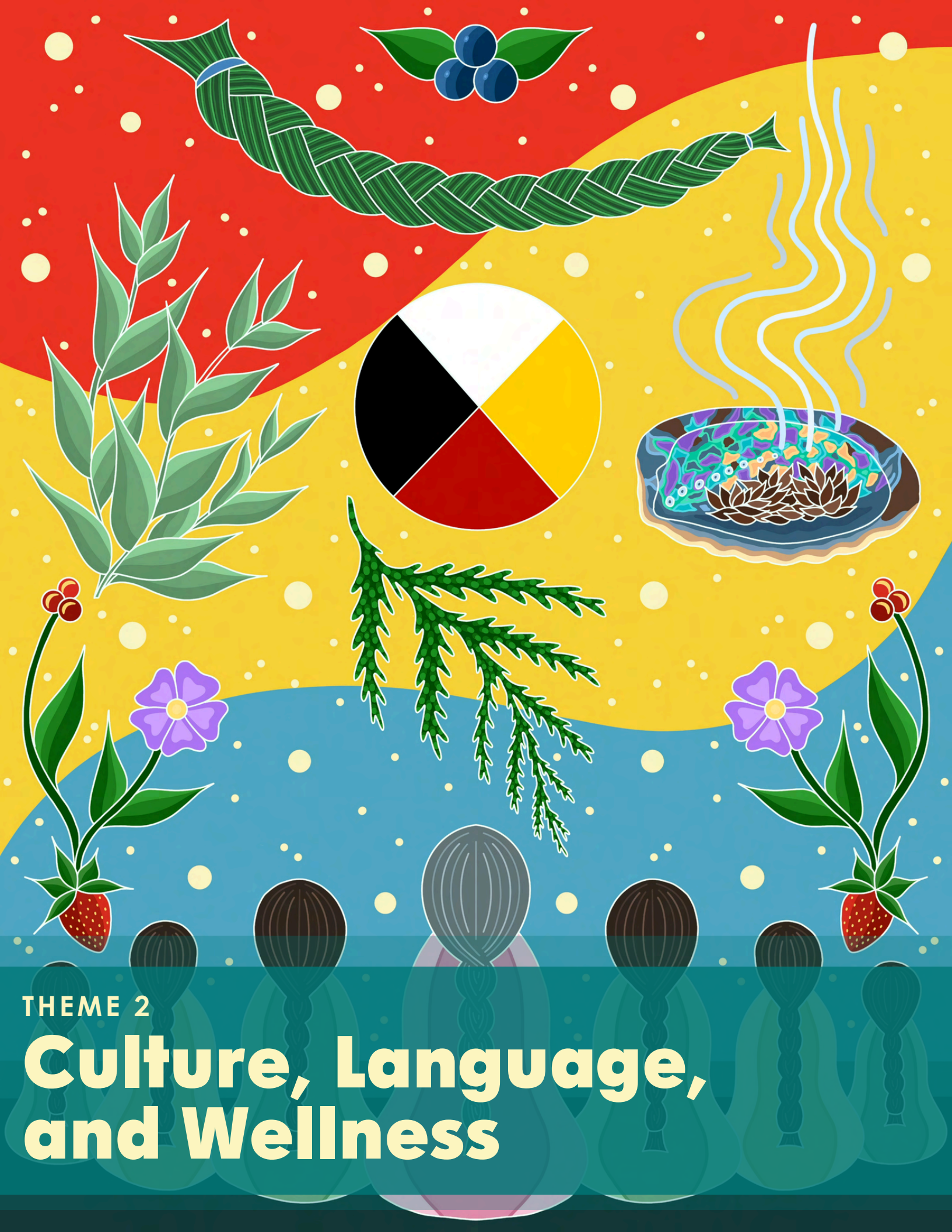
NEEDS & GAPS

- Difficulty in accessing safe supports, such as for mental health
- Money, infrastructure, access to services remain huge barriers to Indigenous youth pursuing their goals
- More safe and affordable housing, particularly in rural, remote, on-reserve areas – and Inuit Nunangat
- More health, wellness, and associated financial supports are needed for Indigenous youth living with disabilities
- More safe spaces for 2SLGBTQIIA+ youth so that they can better achieve their goals and connecting to their communities, and more education at the community level for their safety
- More safe spaces for 2SLGBTQIIA+ youth so that they can better achieve their goals and connecting to their communities, and more education at the community level for their safety

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- Points of connection (community practices/traditions; going out on the land; relationships with Elders etc.) are both accessible and protected
- Increased access to spaces like Friendship Centres
  - Communities and services that are open, supportive, and accepting to all Indigenous youth, regardless of gender identity
  - Ample financial and wellness supports for Indigenous youth to pursue their goals





THEME 2

Culture, Language, and Wellness

THEME 2

Culture, Language, and Wellness

Indigenous Youth Connecting to Culture

In seeking to understand Indigenous youth's experiences of connection and disconnection from their culture, we asked them to identify activities and practices that create feelings of connection, and to tell us about what spaces are available to them that support their connections to culture. We also asked them to describe what barriers they and other youth run into when seeking to connect with culture, and what supports would enable them to strengthen their relationship with their cultures. Finally, we asked them to vision the future of cultural connection and identity for Indigenous youth more generally. Note that while culture and language are deeply intertwined, due to its importance, Indigenous youth's experiences specifically with language is covered in the next section within this theme.

> **My Indigenous culture** gives me a sense of identity, belonging and continuity with my ancestors. It shapes how I see the world.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

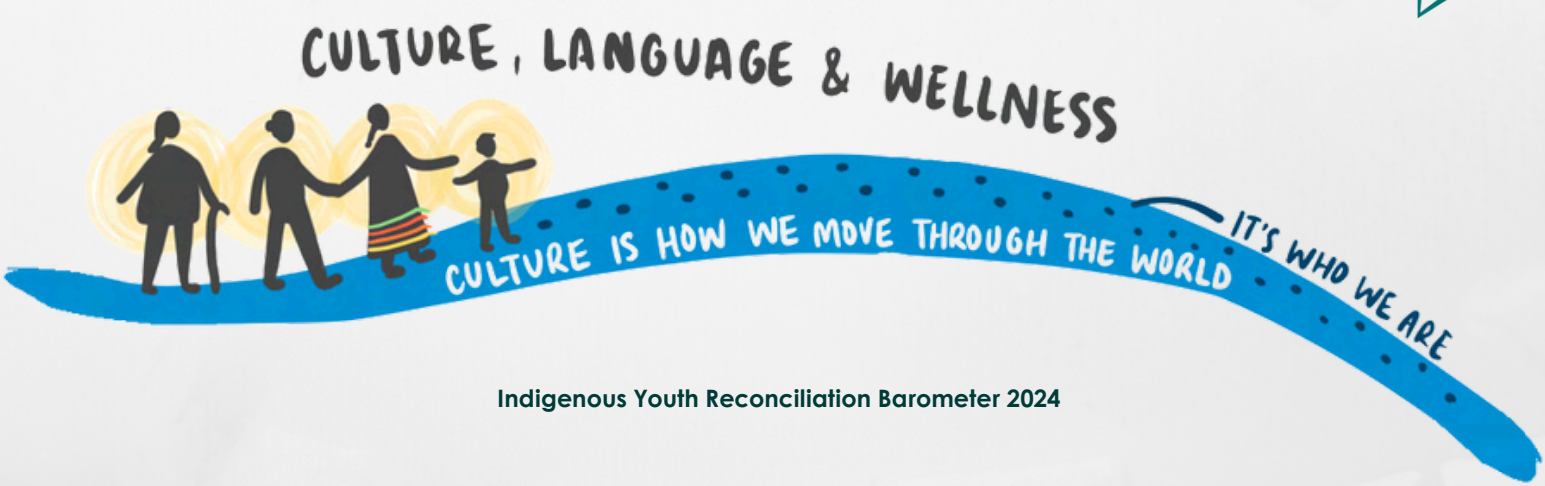
How does culture shape Indigenous youth's lives?

In the sharing circles, youth generally spoke about culture as a source of strength, stability, identity, pride, and belonging. Youth spoke about how important practicing cultural activities — like storytelling, hunting, and language — has been in shaping their sense of self. Additionally, youth talked about culture as a means to helping them understand and navigate the world around them.

> **When I found a connection** to my culture, I felt like it gave me identity. Allowed me to find my passion for the land and the environment and allowed me to build that connection.
>
> *-East Coast Online Sharing Circle Participant*

In the sharing circles and in the survey, many youth spoke about how interwoven culture and community are, while sharing that community is an active, enriching force that enhances individual and collective well-being, and a space that can foster cultural connection.

> **Being raised in Inuit culture** has really helped me with finding beauty in everyday living. Culture has always been my way of finding hope in my community wherever I am. It has helped me feed my spirit to keep going and being able to appreciate myself and my community.
>
> *-Survey Participant*



On a collective level, survey respondents also talked about culture and cultural practices (such as hunting, crafting, drumming, and singing) as a kind of glue binding their families and communities together. On an individual level, culturally connected individuals spoke to how their connection guided their choices on a range of scales, including career and diet choices, where to live, how to maintain relationships of all kinds, and what it means to live well.

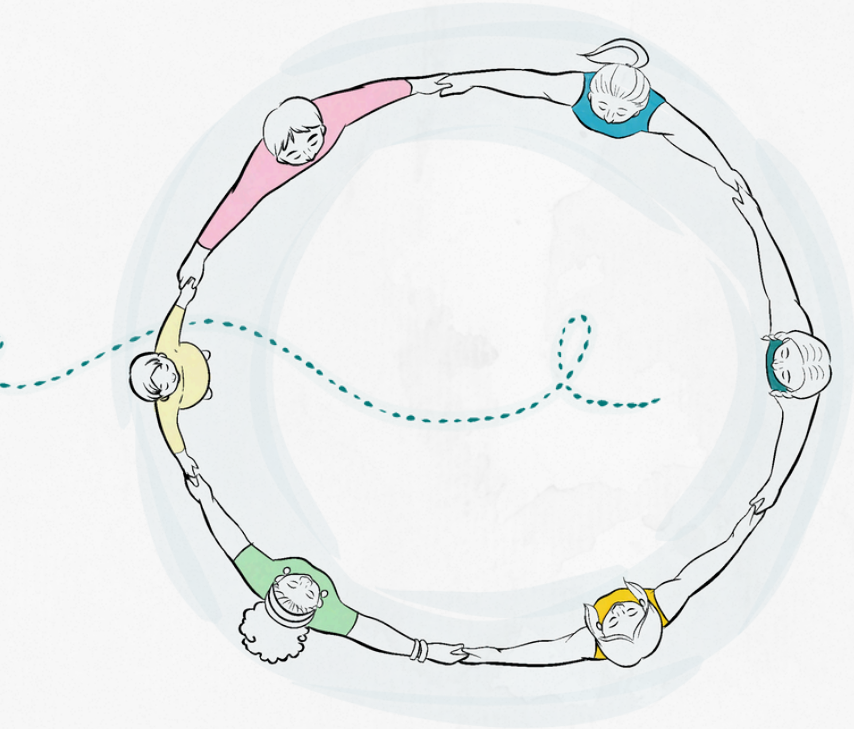
> **My cultural background** has imprinted ageless principles, such the need of revering elders and having close family ties, that direct my interactions and actions. These principles work as a moral compass, guiding my choices and deeds while capturing the wisdom accumulated throughout time.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

As will be discussed in more depth below, youth also spoke to us about the ways in which culture became an emotional and spiritual friction point when other parts of their identities were not welcome in cultural spaces, such as for Two-Spirit or gender diverse youth.

How do Indigenous youth connect to their culture?

In the survey, youth overall reported feeling most connected to their cultures when spending time in their communities, followed by having access to Elders and cultural supports, receiving and engaging with teachings, participating in ceremonies, and harvesting. These five activities, in different orders, constituted the top five activities that made youth feel connected to their cultures across most demographics. Notably, Inuit youth also included singing, dancing, and/or drumming in their top five.

Top 5 means of connecting to culture overall:



67% Spending time in my community

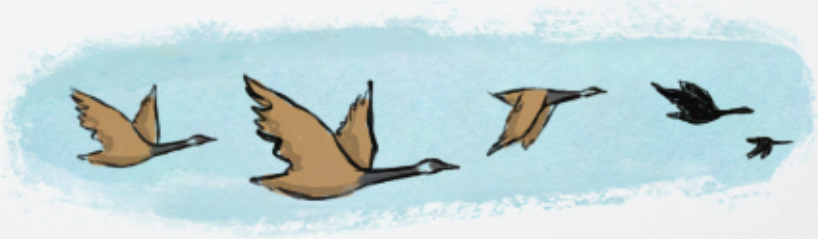
62% Access to Elders and cultural supports

60% Receiving and engaging with teachings

58% Participating in ceremonies

53% Harvesting, including hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering plants and medicines

> **Now that I'm more connected** to the land and in tune spiritually, I feel more confident and that I am not going to fall from wherever I stand. I have a sense of pride.
>
> *-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant*



Top 3 means of connecting to culture by Indigenous Identity:

FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

65% Spending time in my community

60% Access to Elders and cultural supports

59% Receiving and engaging with teachings





INUIT YOUTH

75% Spending time in my community

66% Access to Elders and cultural supports

64% Harvesting, including hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering plants and medicines

MÉTIS YOUTH

69% Receiving and engaging with teachings

68% Spending time in my community

66% Access to Elders and cultural supports

Top 3 means of connecting to culture for:

TWO-SPIRIT AND LGBTQQIA+ YOUTH

66% Spending time in my community

65% Access to Elders and cultural supports

62% Receiving and engaging with teachings

YOUTH LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

65% Spending time in my community

60% Access to Elders and cultural supports

59% Receiving and engaging with teachings

#1 means of connecting to culture by geographic type:

Youth living in urban areas - Spending time in my community **70%**

Youth living in remote or rural Areas - Spending time in my community **65%**

Youth living on-reserve - Access to Elders and cultural supports **63%**



How do Indigenous youth experience cultural disconnection and barriers to connection?

In the sharing circles, Indigenous youth talked about feeling and being disconnected from their culture when they were growing up for a range of reasons that include (but are not limited to) violent colonial interventions like the Indian Residential School System, the Sixties Scoop, attending the Western educational system entrenched in racist ideology, and intergenerational trauma. Often, the cultural disconnection youth reflected on in both the survey and sharing circles is directly tied to a sense of shame for not feeling like they know enough or are enough to belong.

Importantly, this sense of disconnection, shame, and isolation was frequently raised by Indigenous youth who identify as mixed-race, and from those who were raised outside of their community. Many youth also spoke to how the lightness or darkness of their skin directly impacted their sense of belonging to any of their communities.

These conversations related to skin colour and presentation often overlapped with reflections about what it means to be “Indigenous enough” to belong and feelings of inadequacy, faking, and imposter syndrome.

> **I’ve felt so out of touch with my culture without realizing it.**
>
> I was so disconnected because of colonization and generational trauma. Also, as a mixed person, I often felt so out of place, never ‘white’ enough or ‘Inuk’ enough. Throughout the years, I started to reconnect through art, tattooing, and learning about my family, by being proud of my culture and how strong we are in Inuit art.
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant*

> **It dramatically shaped my life,**
>
> being half First Nation and half settler, caused bullying on both sides. Being bullied for heritage was hard, especially because my skin was brown, it led to a lot of bullying. I found pride in my culture when I started university. I absolutely love my culture, being Mi’kmaq is something I’m deeply proud of now, and it’s because I had guidance from Mi’kmaq professors who took me under their wing.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

Across all survey participants, not knowing where to start/who to go to was identified as the top barrier that Indigenous youth face when wanting to connect to their culture. The next most frequently identified barriers for connecting to culture are not enough time/energy after other life responsibilities, financial barriers, mental health, and a lack of programming.

80% Not knowing where to start or who to go to

70% Not enough time, energy or too many other responsibilities

70% Financial barriers and the cost of living

62% Mental health

54% Lack of programming

In breaking these answers down by Indigenous identity, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth all cited not knowing where to start as the top barrier to connecting with culture. It was also the top barrier for Two-Spirit youth, cisgender men and women and cisgender+ youth, non-binary youth, and members of the Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ community overall.

Not knowing where to start remained the top barrier for participants living in nearly every province/territory, with other top barriers broken down in the table below. It was also the top barrier for youth regardless of whether they lived in urban, remote, rural, or on-reserve contexts.

For youth living in urban, remote, and rural areas, financial barriers and not having enough time or energy were the second and third top barriers respectively, while on-reserve youth cited mental health as the second top barrier and not enough time or energy as their third top barrier. Across disability statuses, youth similarly identified not knowing where to start or who to go to was the top barrier keeping them from connecting with culture. Youth who identified as having a disability or are unsure about having a disability reported financial barriers as the second most frequent barrier to connecting with their culture.

#1 Barrier to Connecting to Culture

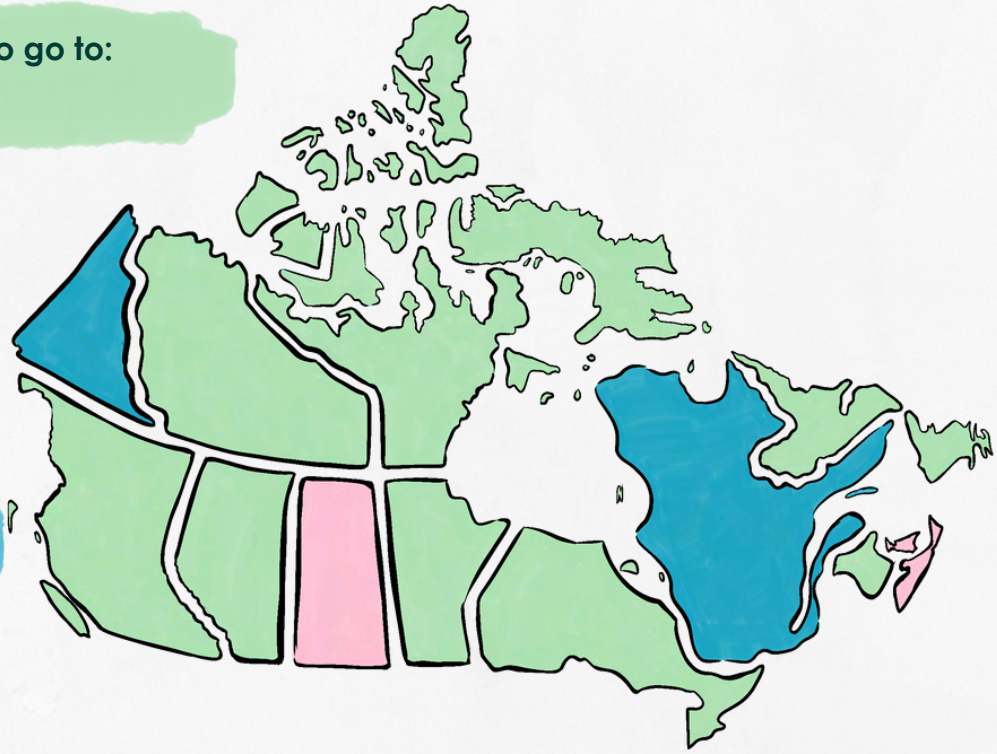
- **For Two-Spirit+ youth:**
  - **Financial barriers / the cost of living**
- **For Non-Binary+ youth:**
  - **Bullying and/or lateral violence**
- **For Transgender men:**
  - **Not enough time/energy after work / school / other responsibilities**
- **For Transgender women:**
  - **Mental health**
- **For Transgender+ youth:**
  - **Lack of programming**

#1 Barrier to Cultural Connection by Province/Territory

Not knowing where to start or who to go to:
- New Brunswick
- Ontario
- Manitoba
- Alberta

Financial Barriers/Cost of living
- Nova Scotia
- Prince Edward Island
- Saskatchewan

Not enough time/energy after work, school, other responsibilities
- Yukon
- Québec



Frequently Mentioned Barriers to Connecting & Reconnecting to Culture	Examples
Intergenerational trauma and systemic racism	• Challenges in learning language, traditions, and skills from Elders who are healing or haven't healed from internalized racism and trauma • Internalized racism being passed down generations • Internalized racism preventing youth from identifying as Indigenous
Physical distance from community	• Increased difficulty of maintaining connection to community and family members • Growing up away from ancestral lands and communities • Moving away from communities for high school and/or post-secondary education
Issues related to belonging and disconnection or reconnection	• Uncertainty around how to connect to culture later in life • Not feeling "Indigenous enough"

Frequently Mentioned Barriers to Connecting & Reconnecting to Culture	Examples
Barriers related to infrastructure gaps within communities (including barriers to remaining in home community)	• Inadequate infrastructure for disabled accessibility • Lack of proper infrastructures and services such as schools, transportation, healthcare, drinking water, internet services, etc. • Housing crisis, unsafe environment, growing up in poverty
Barriers faced within community	• Lateral violence and nepotism within communities • Power imbalances within communities and lack of unity • Exclusion of Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ youth from cultural ceremonies and activities
Barriers to funding and resources	• Lack of funding to support positions dedicated to cultural revitalization within communities • Lack of language programs and online resources
Barriers related to workplace expectations	• No support from workplaces to attend cultural events and ceremony (such as paid ceremony days) • Finding time for family, community, and culture when working 40 hours a week in traditional 9 to 5 type of jobs

> **In Thunder Bay, it's hard to know where to go** as lots of programs are funded by specific tribal councils and Provincial/Territorial Organizations. For example, I'm from Treaty 3 but some of the resources here are only for Nishnawbe-Aski Nation youth. Totally understandable in some ways, but in others it makes it hard.
>
> *-Survey Participant*



During the sharing circles, conversation often turned to how the process of reconnecting with culture has many barriers and layers. One participant discussed the significant role of cultural erasure in their life and the recent efforts to reconnect with their culture, a challenge commonly faced in their community. They noted that reconnecting involves many different factors, such as learning language and traditions, and is an ongoing process that affects their sense of identity and well-being. The next sections discuss in more depth what resources and support are needed to overcome these barriers, but generally, youth reported that the journey to reconnect to culture can be fraught but filled with the potential to be life-changing and life-affirming.

I was really unwell growing up when I was ashamed of my culture as a result of intergenerational trauma

I am now much more self-aware and confident in myself and my culture. I am resistant to colonial culture and I am very proud and open about that. I am grateful to be living life by my own self-determination and I have boundaries in place so that the outside world cannot constantly police everything I say or do. I am happy for this reason.

-Survey Participant

Being disconnected from community and only being recently reintegrated (in the last 6 years)

it was like seeing the whole, and now knowing what was missing— a lot. I've embraced it, and for everything that I've taken, I've worked to contribute back to community.

-Survey Participant



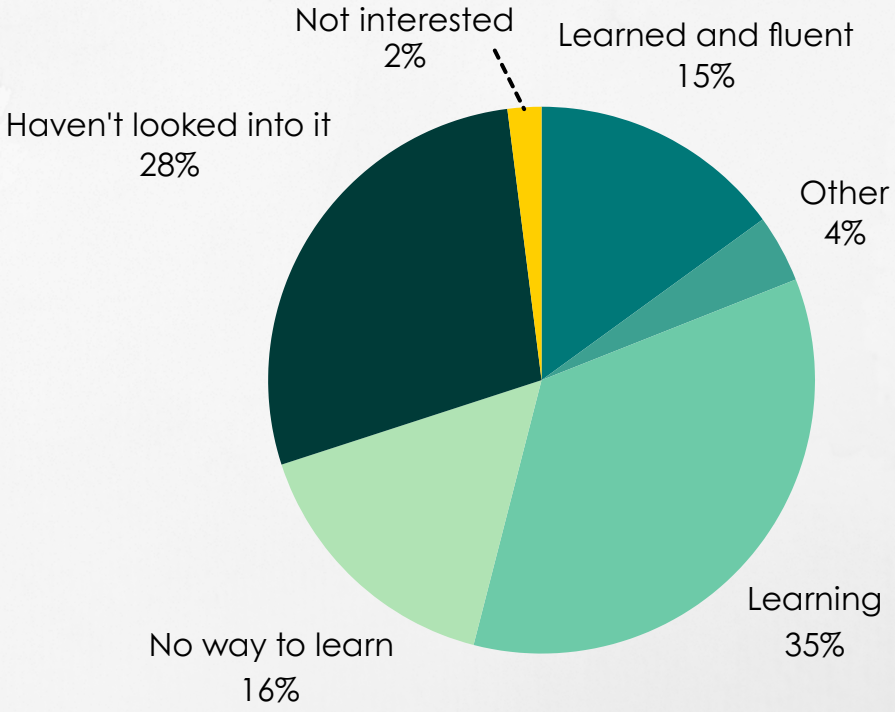
Indigenous Youth Speaking Their Languages

In this section, we asked youth about their experiences in learning their languages, as well as what barriers they have faced in this journey, and about any supports needed. Most Indigenous youth that we surveyed said that they know their language, are in the process of learning it, or want to learn it. For some youth, there was no way for them to learn their language. Youth talked about a variety of resources they accessed in their language learning journey such as online and in-person classes and language learning applications. They also shared about things they thought would better support them and their needs, showing that a wide variety of options for language learning are needed to support youth in differing situations.



What experiences have Indigenous youth had with speaking their languages?

We asked Indigenous youth in the survey about where they are at in their language-learning journey, if that is something they are interested in doing. Responses across all Indigenous youth surveyed are highlighted in the Language Learning Status chart. Here, we can see that 15% of Indigenous youth surveyed are fluent in their language and that 35% are in the process are learning. Notably, a total of 44% want to learn their language, with 16% asserting that there isn't a way for them to do it and 28% saying that they haven't looked into how to learn yet. Only 2% of Indigenous youth surveyed said they are not interested in learning their language, with an additional 4% having selected "other" as a response.



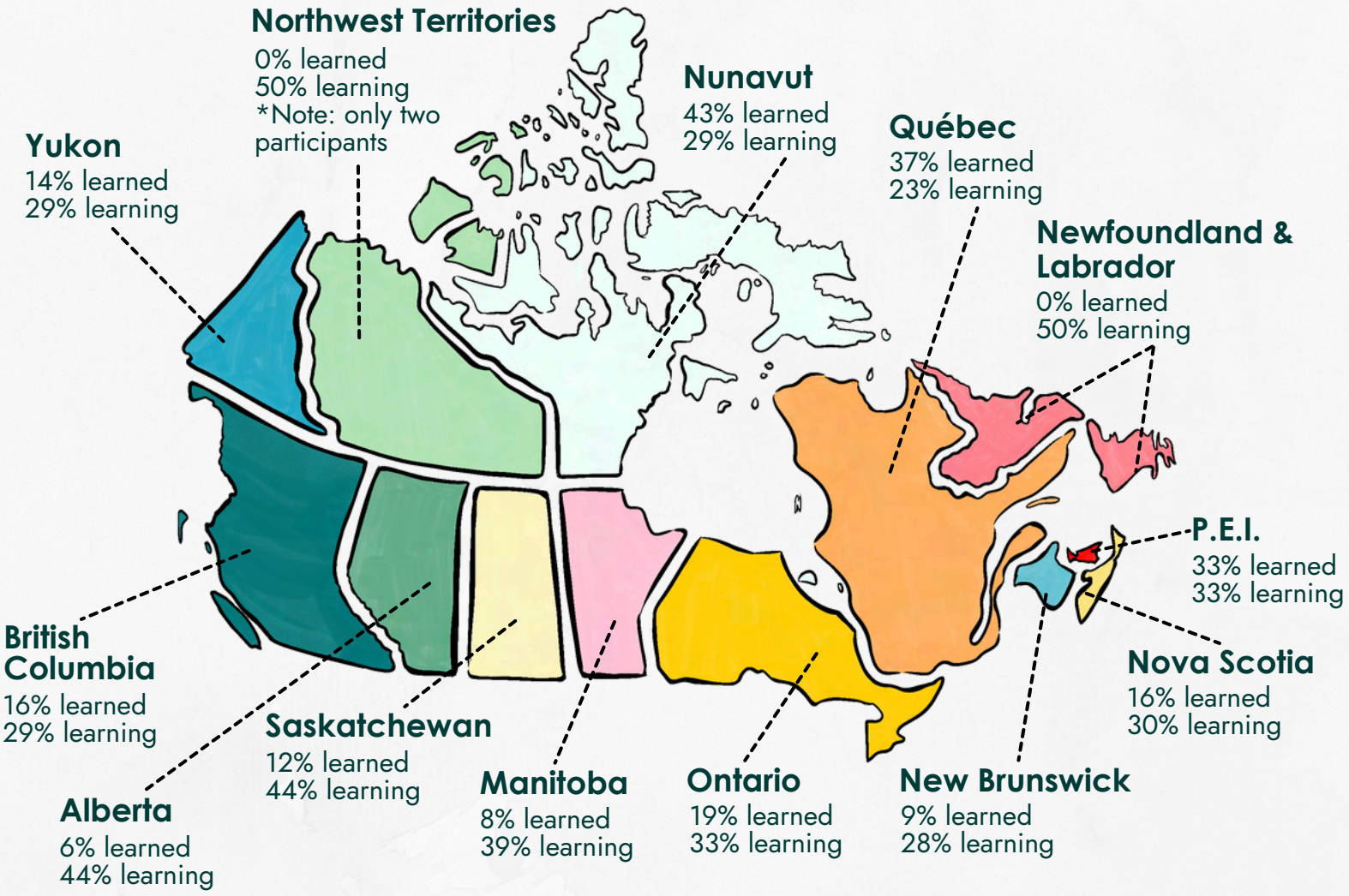
When looking at these responses by Indigenous identity, we see that Inuit participants have the highest rate of having learned their language, and the second highest rate of being in the process of learning. First Nations youth had the highest rate of being in the learning stage and the lowest rate of being fluent at 11%. Métis youth had the lowest rate of not having a way to learn their language, and the highest rate of wanting to learn but not having tried yet. In keeping with the information about First Nations language acquisition status, on-reserve youth had the lowest rate of having learned their language (9%) and the highest rate of being in the process of learning (47%).

	Learned	Learning	Want to learn, but no way to learn	Want to learn but haven't tried yet
First Nations	11%	38%	18%	27%
Inuit	30%	31%	16%	19%
Métis	23%	26%	7%	35%

> **[Learning my language is] challenging but the threat of its extinction motivates me to revive it for coming generations.**
>
> *-Survey Participant*

	Learned	Learning	Want to learn, but no way to learn	Want to learn but haven't tried yet
Urban	15%	33%	16%	28%
Remote/Rural	19%	26%	17%	23%
On-Reserve	9%	47%	13%	28%

Who has learned their language and who is in the process of learning their language?



I learn from Elders and youth in my community, as well as from my mother who is Inuit and is fluent in Inuktitut.

I don't ask to learn as often as I feel like I should, but I know that the community support is there when I need it. At the moment, I'm not accessing any programs to learn Inuktitut, as we need more resources in the community to organize a program for that, or I need to search a bit more thoroughly to find some.

-Survey Participant

When talking about what helped them or is helping them learn their languages in the survey, youth often cited things like online courses, language learning applications, and social media as helpful tools. Many youth also discussed learning their language from fluent family members and speakers in their communities. One respondent reflected on learning from others in their community, and the need for more community-based language programs.

For many Indigenous youth, learning their languages is a rewarding experience that helps them to connect with their culture and their communities, and is a key part of their identity. When talking about their experiences in learning their languages, some youth also talked about the importance of language revitalization, being able to communicate with Elders, and wanting to honour their ancestors.

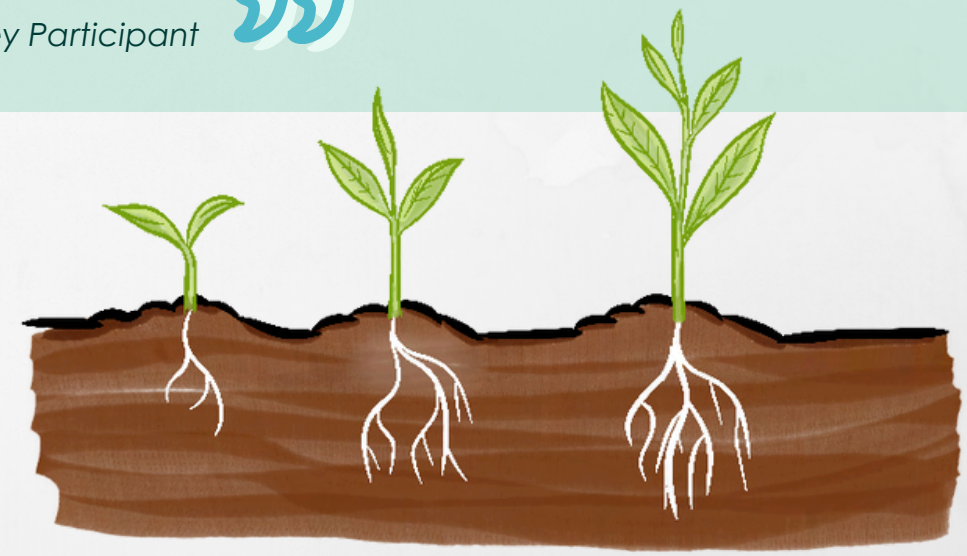
2019 Barometer Comparison

In the 2019 Barometer, participants were relatively evenly split on whether learning their ancestral language fluently was important to living a good life, with 33% saying it was very important, 35% saying it was somewhat important, and 29% saying it was not so important. Notably, Métis participants were more likely to say that speaking their ancestral language fluently was not so important (50%), while Indigenous youth living on-reserve were more likely to say it was very important (40%).

“I’ve always been terrible at learning languages, but when I started learning my ancestors’ language everything changed

and I started to really absorb and understand what I was being taught. I've never worked so hard or felt so much love for learning and pride in small accomplishments as I do learning my language. Going to other more fluent communities and knowing some of what people say has been incredible at helping me feel more like I belong.”

-Survey Participant



What barriers do Indigenous youth face in learning their languages?

As seen in the previous section, most Indigenous youth that we surveyed either knew their languages, were learning their languages, or said they were interested in learning. However, 16% of Indigenous youth reported having no way for them to learn their language, even though they were interested in doing so. When looking at the survey responses, there were some demographics of youth that were more likely to say they have no way of learning their language. These include youth with multiple Indigenous identities, gender-diverse youth and Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ youth, youth living in Atlantic provinces, and youth living in the North (except for Nunavut).



% of Youth with no way of learning their language, by Indigenous identity:

18% First Nations

7% Métis

16% Inuit

23% Youth with multiple Indigenous identities

% of Youth with no way of learning their language, by gender and sexuality:

18% Two-Spirit

29% Two-Spirit+

24% Non-Binary and/or Agender

27% Transgender Men

20% Transgender Women

18% Youth who identify as 2SLGBTQQIA+

8% Cisgender men

15% Cisgender women

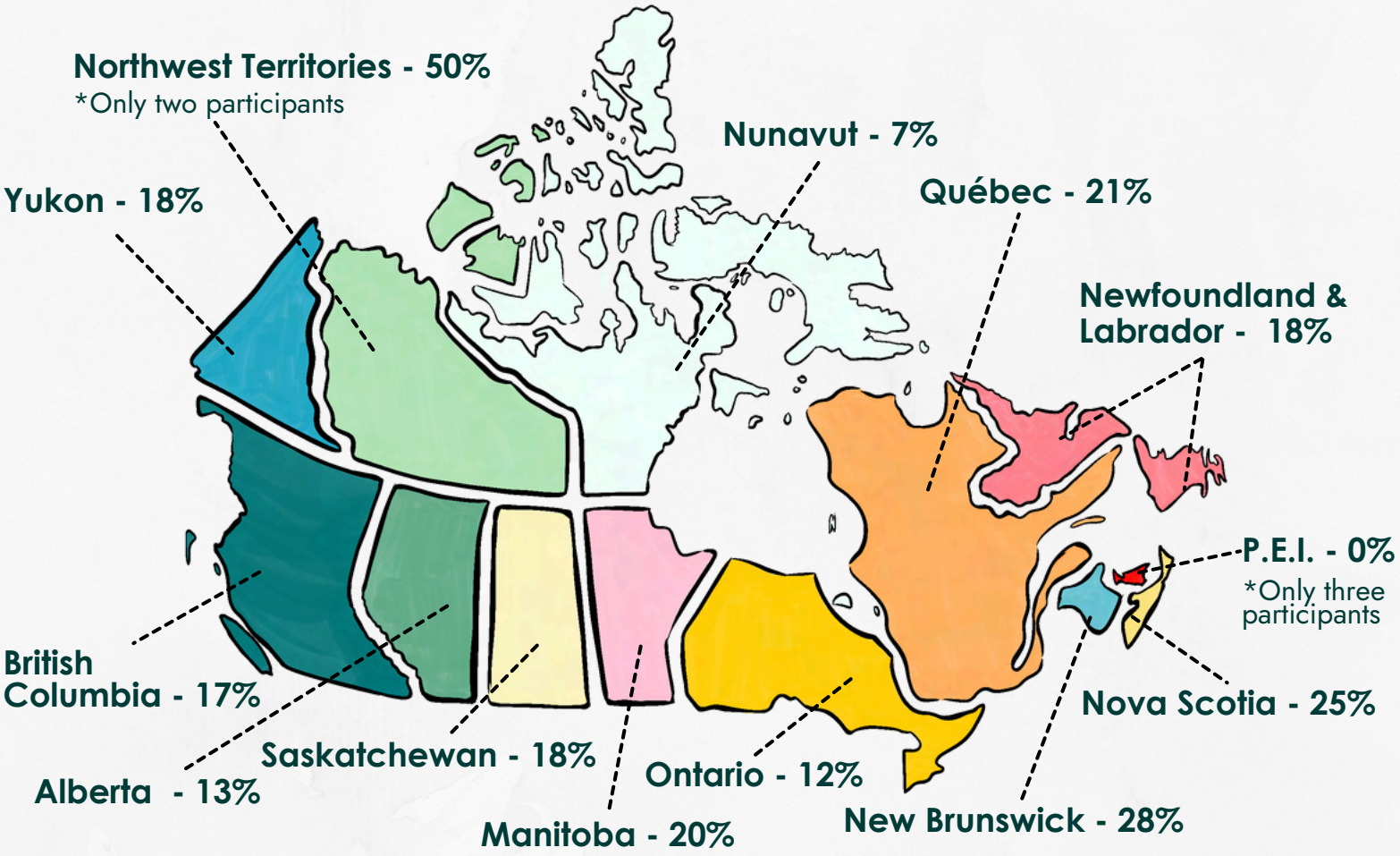
13% Youth who don't identify as 2SLGBTQQIA+

16% Gender not listed/ prefer not to say

42% Cisgender+

See the Demographic Analysis section of the full report for an explanation of how we broke up these gender categories!

What % of participants from each province and territory have no way of learning their language?



Youth living in urban areas - 16%

Youth living in rural or remote areas - 17%

Youth living on-reserve - 13%

Youth living with disabilities - 12%

Youth not living with disabilities - 22%

Disability status - prefer not to say - 25%

These youth, as well as the youth who are in the process of learning their language or already know their language, identified many barriers to language learning. In the survey, youth often said they ran into barriers such as not having enough time to learn because of other commitments like work and school. Youth also brought up barriers such as limited speakers in their languages, financial barriers (either with cost of programming or not being able to take time off work), having to access classes through post-secondary institutions, geographical barriers, classes or programming not being accessible to them, and lack of safe spaces.

I am interested in learning my language and am aware of a large number of resources available.

Unfortunately, I know that I have an extremely hard time learning on my own and have yet to find group options that work with my schedule.

-Survey Participant

I am unsure of where is a safe place to go to learn Michif.

I am in group chats and Facebook groups however the teachings and resources provided are very inaccessible to understand. Especially as someone with a learning disability.

-Survey Participant



What supports are needed for Indigenous youth in learning their language(s)?

As discussed above, youth in the survey often felt like they did not have enough time to learn their language with their other commitments or had trouble accessing language programming due to financial constraints. Youth who had faced financial barriers in learning their language often expressed wanting to see more free or low-cost programming and more opportunities for grants for language programming. Additionally, more options for online programming and opportunities to learn at their own pace would be beneficial to many youth who have had a difficult time accessing opportunities due to other commitments, and for youth who live away from their communities or outside of their traditional territories.

> **Being an Indigenous settler on lands that aren't my own, I've found it really difficult to get access to my own language.**
>
> *-Survey Participant*

> **I have very few options to practice it, and don't always feel welcome attending spaces to learn it. I'm doing my best with online courses and apps.**
>
> *-Survey Participant*

When youth talked about programming they have found or have taken to learn their language, some mentioned that the only option available to them was through post-secondary institutions. Some youth didn't want to go this route due to things like cost, previous experiences with post-secondary education, and preferring to learn within their community. Having more opportunities for learning within their communities, or online from community members, would be a great support to youth in learning their languages.

When talking about wanting to learn in their communities specifically, youth often said that they want more opportunities for language immersion and in-person programming, and other opportunities to learn from people in their community. Being able to speak their language with others was important for many youth, with some saying that learning online may be difficult for them, and that being able to connect with Elders was something they would like to do.

When talking about wanting to learn in their communities specifically, youth often said that they want more opportunities for language immersion and in-person programming, and other opportunities to learn from people in their community. Being able to speak their language with others was important for many youth, with some saying that learning online may be difficult for them, and that being able to connect with Elders was something they would like to do.

> **Fortunately my community has many language resources - we have language books, an app, story books, and much more.**
>
> I will admit it is a lot harder learning from a book than learning from a language speaker. My community unfortunately does not provide online language classes anymore. We do still have enough language speakers in the community to learn from in person, this is a huge reason I want to live in my community.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

> **I've been trying to teach myself Mohawk via the Speak Mohawk app, but it's been a struggle.**
>
> To learn a language you need people to practice with, and that's not an option available to me. I don't qualify for any of the programs available.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

Language acquisition is an important anchor to Indigenous youth's connection to culture, community, and empowerment. Overall, a variety of options for free or low-cost language programming would facilitate Indigenous youth looking to learn. Some options like online spaces may be a great way to learn for some, but may not work for others, as everyone learns differently. Many youth may find it more beneficial to learn from Elders and other community members in-person, being able to speak the language with others day-to-day. And as noted in the section above, there are some youth from specific demographics – such as Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ youth and youth living in the Atlantic provinces, among others – who identified needing tailored, accessible language programming.

Indigenous Youth Building Wellness

In asking Indigenous youth how they define wellness and what they need to build wellness, participants also discussed how culture affects their sense of wellness and what hinders wellness. We also asked about how and if climate change affects their wellness. For many youth, culture and wellness are deeply intertwined, with culture supporting all aspects of wellness.

How does culture affect Indigenous youths' sense of wellness?

Youth in the sharing circles explained that connecting to their culture and integrating it into their lives was key in promoting their mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Some participants shared about how things like eating traditional foods, being on the land, and being around their community helps to sustain their wellness. Others shared about how things like ceremony help them with different aspects of their wellness, and about the healing that culture and ceremony can bring.



In my language, *Mino Bimaadiziwin* means 'to live a good life' -

when I'm in the bush I feel free. I feel like all aspects – mental, physical, emotional, spiritual all align.

-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant



Many Indigenous youth we spoke to were not able to grow up connected to their culture and are on a journey of reconnection. In the survey, youth who were reconnecting to their culture talked about how doing so helped them feel a sense of belonging and community while reshaping their perspectives about the world and their relationships and helping them heal. Some also shared about feeling disconnected from their culture, and how that can have a negative impact on their wellness. The importance of reconnecting to culture was echoed in the sharing circles, with youth saying that reconnecting to their culture helped them with mental wellness and facing challenges like addiction.

I'm not well when I can't eat country food,

I am not well when I can't go out on the land and be with my family. I am well when I can be around my people, when I can eat my Inuksiut, when I can be Inuk. Be in my culture and conduct our traditions that help and heal me.

-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant

Overall, being connected to and reconnecting to culture is an important part of all aspects of wellness for many Indigenous youth. Culture is a key support in the lives of Indigenous youth that helps foster a sense of belonging and safety and helps many to heal from intergenerational traumas and other challenges.

I find my culture plays the most influential part of my sense of wellness.

I find when I am disconnected from my culture I lose a sense of self and go through an identity crisis. Not being connected to my culture leads me to do things I would never do when I do have a good wellbeing.

-Survey Participant

When working in the south, I felt disconnected from family and community.

Had to make an emergency trip back home for my own well-being. My antidepressant was coming back home. I felt like I was losing myself because we live in two worlds and I felt so immersed in colonized world. When it's not there you realize it's importance.

-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant

When I started connecting to my culture more things in my life made sense

and I allowed myself to realize the intergenerational trauma and how it affects me. I am learning how to deal with them in a more appropriate way. It sounds cliché but it helps keep me balanced because its like a missing piece has been found.

-Survey Participant

Reconnecting to culture saved me. Being queer, labels didn't feel right.

Nothing ever felt right, until I was in Saskatoon, and I heard someone talk about being Two-Spirit. I was in active addiction and homeless [...] As I returned to culture, and started accepting and embracing culture, it saved me. I understood who I was because of language and culture. I don't have to fit into colonial labels and realizing that was life saving.

-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant

What barriers do Indigenous youth face in building wellness?

We asked Indigenous youth in the survey about the barriers that they and other Indigenous youth face in building wellness. Here, the most frequently cited barrier was mental health. The top 5 most selected responses were:

67% Mental Health

65% Not enough time, energy, or too many other responsibilities

63% Not knowing where to start or who to go to

62% Financial barriers / cost of living

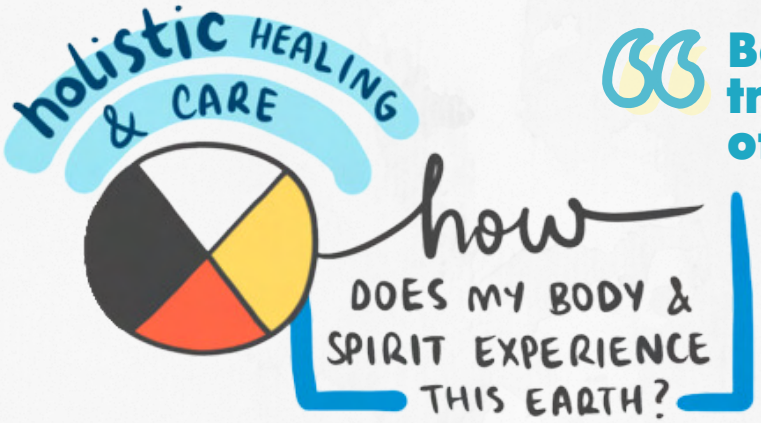
47% Lack of access to healthy, affordable foods in stores

When talking about how culture and wellness are intertwined in the survey, participants also often brought up how being disconnected from their culture impacts their wellness. For many Indigenous youth, culture is an important part of wellness and feeling disconnected from one can be a barrier to accessing the other. In addition to this, youth often talked about how not being able to access healing or other supports within their communities can be a barrier to their wellness.



> **Sometimes it's hard to get outsiders to understand my mental and physical well-being, and the ways I need to heal** personally to influence the healing of those things. With a connection of culture I believe I could find ways to make myself heal in a more holistic sense.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

In the sharing circles, youth echoed the sentiments shared in the survey, talking about how barriers like mental health and lack of access to healthy, affordable foods and traditional foods impact the wellness of themselves and their communities. Many also shared about how all aspects of wellness are connected, and how when one piece is negatively impacted, the others are as well. Lack of access to spaces that promote wellness through culture was also talked about frequently. Some youth talked about how they feel unsafe accessing certain spaces, while others talked about how spaces that are relevant to them do not exist near them.



Being disconnected from our traditional foods has caused a lot of health issues in our community

and giving people the chance to connect with our traditional foods can help with our physical wellness.

-On-Reserve Online Sharing Circle Participant

We also asked youth in the survey if they felt like climate change impacts their sense of wellness, and if so, what the impacts are. While some youth said that they felt no impact or were unsure, many others shared about how climate change has impacted themselves and their communities. Here, youth often talked about feeling climate anxiety, grief, exhaustion, and concern for future generations as well as animal relations. Some also shared about how climate change has exacerbated health conditions (e.g., asthma). For many Indigenous youth, being able to access traditional foods is an important part of their wellness. These youth often pointed out that climate change has made it more difficult to access traditional foods. When responding to the question about what barriers they and other Indigenous youth face in building wellness, 27% said climate change was one of the top barriers.

Yes. Living in BC, we deal with breathing wildfire smoke yearly now.

For some, this goes on all summer. This results in less time spent outside, more fear and worry about the fires and the destruction they bring, and more concerns about breathing and how the smoke affects our health. I have started to feel more depressed over the summer.

-Survey Participant

Yes! This may seem so silly, but I am someone who loves the snow.

Year after year lately, I'm noticing the snow is coming much later than it should be – which ultimately upsets me to an extent, as it to me, is calming and reminds me of home and many special memories. The lack of snow almost feels like a piece of my own identity is being taken from me.

-Survey Participant

What supports do Indigenous youth need to build wellness?



Culture, language, and wellness are very much intertwined for many Indigenous youth. In the sharing circles, youth highlighted that many workplaces do not recognize or support cultural practices as a part of wellness. One participant shared about how they appreciate workplaces that offer paid days off for cultural practices, and flexible funds for wellness that could be used to cover cultural items and costs of programming. This was contrasted by many sharing about unsupportive work environments where cultural needs were not honoured, such as with time off for harvesting. Many youth called for workplaces and schools to provide genuine cultural support to support wellness.

> **My family felt it was necessary that our cultural education was just as important as our colonial education.**
>
> My mom fought the school board for us not to be penalized for missing school. She said our cultural education is just as important as the Western ways.
>
> *-On-Reserve Online Sharing Circle Participant*

Youth also often expressed that they want to see more multigenerational gatherings, saying that they want to connect with people from across their communities. Additionally, the theme of wanting more language revitalization efforts emerged in the sharing circles. Here, youth discussed wanting to see more accessible language opportunities, as noted in the previous section, specifically on language. This included efforts for languages less commonly spoken in family and community settings, as highlighted by a participant who talked about their goals to learn Michif, despite the lack of speakers in their family.

The sharing circles also saw youth highlighting the need for culturally appropriate mental health resources, with many saying that the current services available are not sufficient or are outright violent. One youth at one of the Toronto sharing circles even emphasized this gap, saying "Our psych ward is only for those 19 years old and up. If you're younger, they take you to Winnipeg in a police car, or you get shipped off to Brandon." Many also called for more culturally relevant and trauma-informed services across the board, with some specifically calling out the child welfare system for needing change. One participant shared about how the child welfare system fosters a sense of disconnection from culture:

> **How do you get access to [cultural teachings]?**
>
> Especially for those who went through child welfare, it's hard to know where to start connecting again.
>
> *-Victoria Sharing Circle Participant*



In the survey, the need for more physical spaces to support connection to culture was highlighted, especially for youth in particular demographics. We asked youth if they have a space in their community or where they are living to support their connection to their culture, and across all Indigenous youth surveyed, 35% reported having no space like this, while 65% said that they did have access to such a space. When looking at these responses across different demographics, we can see that some youth are less likely than others to have a space that supports cultural connection. Youth in the following demographics were more likely to say they do not have such a space:

50% of youth in New Brunswick

50% of youth in the Northwest Territories *(of 2 participants)*

43% of Inuit youth

39% of Métis youth

39% of Transgender women

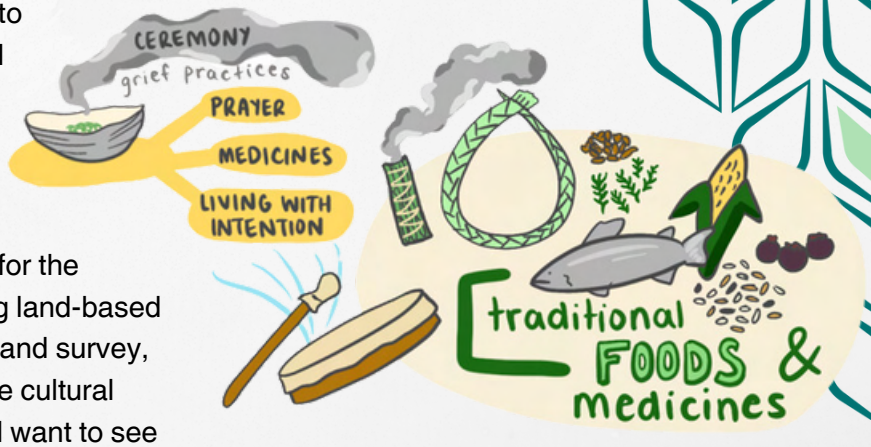
39% of youth in Nova Scotia

39% of youth in British Columbia

39% of youth living in rural or remote communities

37% of Afro-Indigenous youth

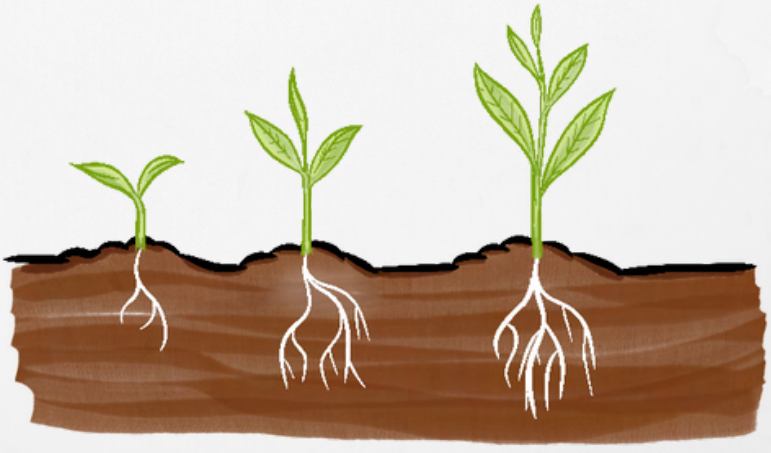
The need for more spaces and ways to connect with culture was emphasized in both the sharing circles and online survey. Many youth shared that being able to be on the land was fundamental to their cultural identity and wellness and advocated for the introduction and expansion of existing land-based programs. Across the sharing circles and survey, Indigenous youth have called for more cultural supports, programs, and spaces, and want to see services being delivered in a culturally relevant and safe way.



In both the sharing circles and survey, many participants talked about the need for safe healing spaces, especially for Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ youth. When talking about these spaces, youth often said they envision them being free of judgement and being an important part in the journey of (re)connection for Indigenous youth. Many also expressed that they envision a future in their communities where lateral violence does not exist. Youth expressed how important it was to them to foster cultural connectedness, pride, and overall wellness for future generations.

> **A lot of dreams I have for my family and my community is slowly happening –**
> my sister teaching Inuktitut to her son – changes are happening even though they're slow, things are changing for the better.
> *-Montreal Sharing Circle Participant*

Overall, while discussing wellness, youth shared visions of a future where all aspects of wellbeing can be supported and where culture is acknowledged as a key part of holistic wellness. Many Indigenous youth want to lay the groundwork for this not only for themselves, but also for future generations of youth and their communities. Many youth highlighted that the process of reconnecting with one's culture is a collective effort that benefits not just individuals but entire communities, leading to what they hope will be a strength-based resurgence of Indigenous joy and intergenerational joy.



TAKEAWAYS:
CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND WELLNESS

STRENGTHSA

- Indigenous youth are motivated and empowered by language revitalization. They want to honour their ancestors, see their languages spoken for generations to come, and foster greater community connections through language
- Most Indigenous youth either know their languages, are in the process of learning, or are interested in learning, with youth living in Nunavut having a particularly strong rate of learned and learning
- Indigenous youth agree that culture is a source of strength, stability, identity, pride, and belonging
- The journey to (re)connect to culture can be fraught but filled with the potential to be life-changing and life-affirming
- Indigenous youth want to see future generations strongly connected to culture

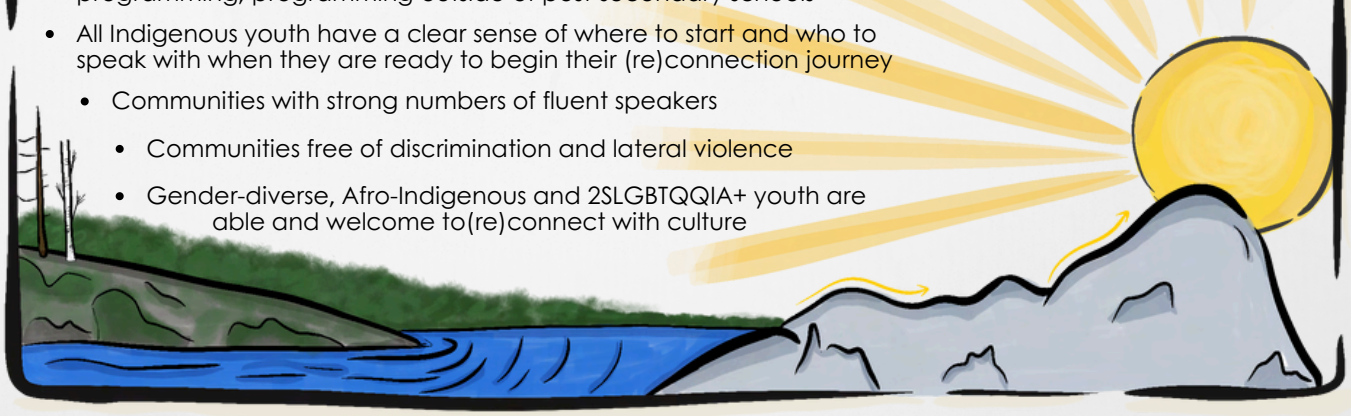


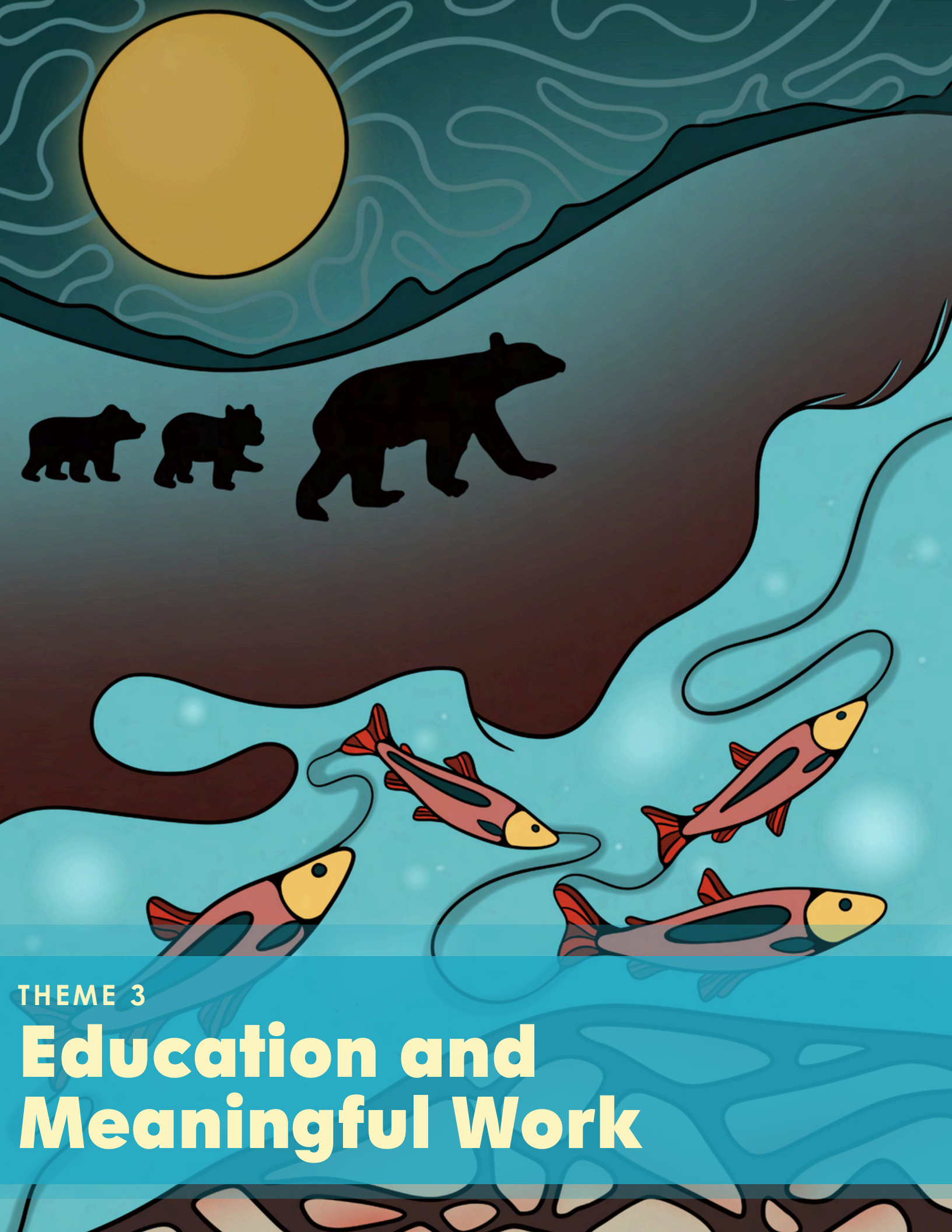
NEEDS & GAPSA

- All youth need free and/or low-cost language programming, no matter where they live
- In seeking to (re)connect with culture, youth most often don't know who to go to or where to start
- Everyone has diverse ways of learning and unique needs – youth need a variety of safe, accessible spaces to learn
- When youth feel excluded or disconnected from their culture and communities, it's frequently related to lateral violence and colourism
- Lack of accessible language programming for youth living on the east coast, youth living with a disability, gender-diverse & 2SLGBTQQIA+ youth, and youth living away from home communities
- Many youth do not have access to cultural spaces or programs, including but not limited to, Inuit youth, Afro-Indigenous youth, and youth living in rural or remote communities

VISION FOR THE FUTUREA

- Indigenous youth leading the way in language revitalization
- Accessible language programming – more online options, more in-community options, cost-free programming, programming outside of post-secondary schools
- All Indigenous youth have a clear sense of where to start and who to speak with when they are ready to begin their (re)connection journey
- Communities with strong numbers of fluent speakers
- Communities free of discrimination and lateral violence
- Gender-diverse, Afro-Indigenous and 2SLGBTQQIA+ youth are able and welcome to(re)connect with culture





THEME 3

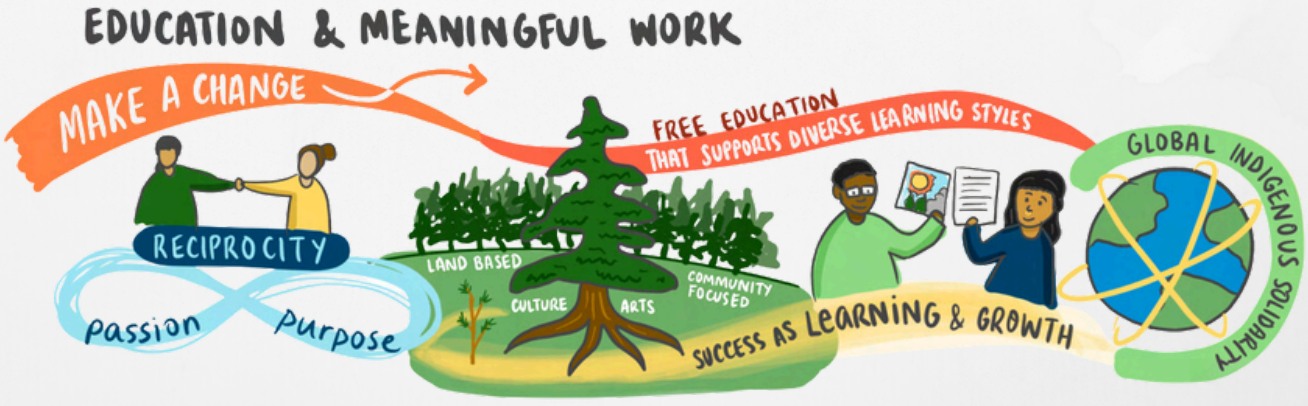
Education and Meaningful Work

THEME 3

Education and Meaningful Work

Indigenous Youth & Education

We asked youth what education looks like to them, what supports they need to succeed in education, and what barriers they have faced in their education journeys. Indigenous youth's definitions of education extend beyond receiving post-secondary education and includes things like lived experiences, on the land learning, and participating in culture. When accessing post-secondary education, most youth said that they need increased financial supports to succeed, along with things like more Indigenous-led programs, cultural supports, learning supports, and help with transportation.



What does education look like to Indigenous youth?

The responses in this section paint an expansive picture of how Indigenous youth understand education, and while that picture can include post-secondary or other institutional education, it doesn't encompass the whole of how Indigenous youth define and experience education. Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, youth were most likely to define education as:

83% Learning through lived experiences

81% Learning on the land through observation & practice

64% Oral teachings

64% Learning by participating in ceremonies

64% Getting a degree or diploma from an educational institution

When looking at how different demographics of youth chose their top five, these responses held true for most youth. However, there were a few notable exceptions. Two-Spirit youth, transgender men and women, and youth living in the Yukon, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island were more likely to select "pursuing my passions, sports or hobbies" as part of how they define education. Youth living in Québec were more likely to select "completing an apprenticeship or trades program" as part of their understanding of education.

83%

of Indigenous youth define education as learning through lived experiences, compared to 64% defining it as getting a degree or diploma.

When reflecting on what else education means to them, many responded with similar views to the above, saying that education doesn't have to be only from a post-secondary institution, but includes a variety of experiences.

Participants in the sharing circles expressed similar sentiments to the survey, saying that education can encompass a variety of things like lived experiences, self-led research, and self-taught skills, as examples. Some youth also shared about how they felt like education outside of institutions should be just as valued.

We also asked youth in the survey about their education and work plans for the next few years. Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, 93% and 95% respectively said that they would likely be using their education to contribute positively to and empower their community or using their lived experiences to do so. Notably, 70% of Indigenous youth surveyed said that they are planning on moving away from their current community for work, and 57% for school.

> **[Education is] anywhere you gain knowledge**
> and develop your sense of self or your world view.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

> **[Education is] participating in programs**
> provided by non-profits, groups, (not your own) communities, conferences, etc.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

> **Education is not just going to school**
> to do something. Researching something due to interest is also education.
>
> *-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant*

> **Artists don't need an art degree**
> you can go to school to learn art if you want, but if you learn it outside of school your knowledge and skill should still be just as valued.
>
> *-East Coast Online Sharing Circle Participant*



It is important to note that for many Indigenous youth, moving away from their community for work or school may be a necessity rather than a preferred option, especially for those living on-reserve or in rural and remote areas. Many youth also said they plan on obtaining or furthering their post-secondary education, with 39% saying they will likely obtain a trades certificate in the next few years, 48% saying they will likely obtain a college diploma, 67% saying they will likely obtain a bachelor's or master's degree, and 53% saying they will likely obtain a PhD.

In the next few years, how likely is it that you will be doing the following?	Not likely	Likely (Very Likely or Somewhat Likely)	Not applicable
Working a job in the community I live in	10%	88%	3%
Moving away from my current home or community for work	27%	70%	4%
Using my education to contribute positively to empower my community	4%	93%	3%
Using my lived experiences to positively contribute to my community	3%	95%	2%
Taking part in programming in my community (on the land programs, beading workshops, etc.)	6%	92%	2%
Volunteering in the community where I live	6%	91%	3%

In the next few years, how likely is it that you will be doing the following?	Not likely	Likely (Very Likely or Somewhat Likely)	Not applicable
Moving away from my current home or community for school	36%	57%	7%
Attending college, trade program, or university for the first time	15%	46%	39%
Upgrading previous education to get into a trade or academic program	16%	65%	20%
Finishing High School	8%	26%	66%
Obtaining a trades certificate (completing an apprenticeship)	28%	39%	34%
Obtaining a college diploma	19%	48%	33%
Obtaining a university degree (bachelor's or master's)	16%	67%	17%
Obtaining a university degree (PhD)	31%	53%	16%

What barriers do Indigenous youth face in education?

During the sharing circles, when talking about barriers they have faced in education, financial barriers were often brought up. Several youth shared about the lack of available funding for non-status youth, and how not being able to access funding has impacted their educational journey. Some who could access band funding talked about how it is often not adequate or how the requirements were barriers for them, such as not being able to access it as a part-time student. Others shared about lack of accessible scholarship opportunities, citing the inaccessibility of filling out some applications, lack of feedback when receiving rejections, and just not knowing of or being able to find something that is available to them.

Additionally, barriers around receiving funding from Métis governments were shared. One youth shared about how the requirements and funding amounts for this can vary by Métis government, and how the inconsistency can be a barrier for some Métis post-secondary students.

When talking about financial barriers, the cost of living was a common theme that emerged. Many youth shared about needing to work while going to school to support themselves, which puts a strain on their education and impacts their overall wellness.

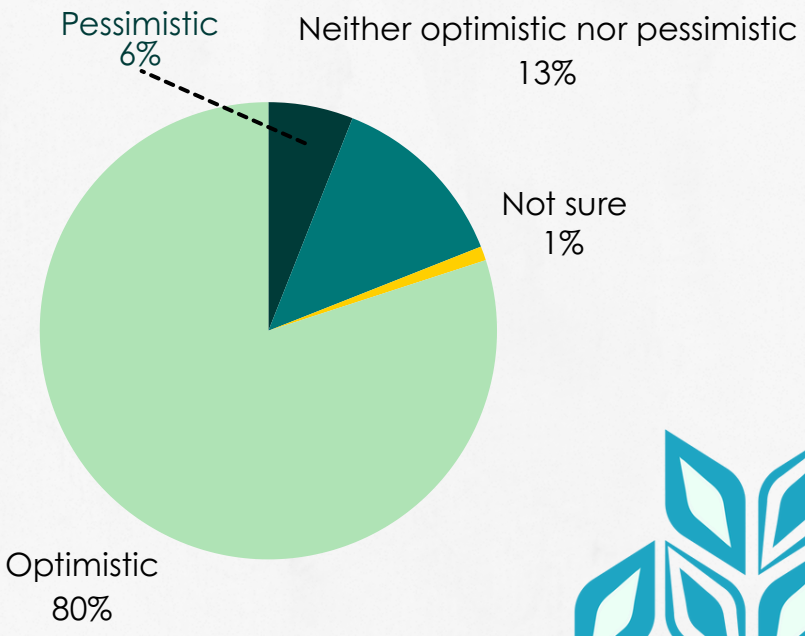
> **Housing, food, other costs -**
>
> It's awful hard to learn and succeed, to concentrate, when you're working full time trying to make ends meet. With rents the way they are, some folks just cannot afford to take time off work to learn. When you're cutting grocery costs you get sick all the time.
>
> *-East Coast Online Sharing Circle Participant*



Many other barriers also emerged in the sharing circles, such as needing to leave home communities for school (either for secondary or post-secondary), facing discrimination and tokenization in classroom settings, lack of available childcare, and inaccessible post-secondary application processes. Several youth also shared about the lack of resources for Indigenous students, and how difficult it is to find the resources that do exist.

In the survey, we asked Indigenous youth about how they felt about opportunities for education being made available to them and other Indigenous youth in the future. Despite the barriers faced, most youth in the survey said they felt optimistic about educational opportunities being made available to them. Here, 80% of Indigenous youth said that they felt optimistic about these opportunities, while only 6% said they felt pessimistic.

How optimistic do you feel about educational opportunities being made available to you and other Indigenous youth in the future?



What supports do Indigenous youth need to succeed in education?

As outlined previously, Indigenous youth have a wide range of plans and goals related to education. In the survey, we asked youth about what supports they need to achieve these goals. Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, financial assistance was by far the top support needed in achieving these goals. The top five responses across all Indigenous youth surveyed were:

91% Financial assistance (e.g., scholarships, living expenses, education funding or tuition wavers)

52% Indigenous-led education programs

52% Having a safe or supportive learning environment

50% Social, emotional, or cultural supports provided by the school you are attending

43% Access to reliable transportation



While these were identified as the most needed supports across the majority of participants and demographic breakdowns, some groups were more likely than others to include certain options in their top five:

More likely to need more local or online education opportunities:

- Youth living in British Columbia (40%)
- Youth living in the Northwest Territories (50% - low # of responses)
- Youth living in the Yukon (50%)
- Youth living in Prince Edward Island (100% - low # of responses)
- Youth living on-reserve (47%)
- Youth living in remote or rural areas (48%)

More likely to need more near campus subsidized housing for Indigenous students:

- Inuit youth (43%)
- Youth living in Newfoundland & Labrador (50%), Youth living in Nunavut (50%)

More likely to need more Indigenous teachers:

- Youth living in the Northwest Territories (50% - low # of responses)

In the sharing circles, youth identified similar barriers to accessing education. When discussing this, youth called for enhanced and accessible financial supports such as low-requirement grants. Some youth also called for more supports in finding and applying for available grants and bursaries – and even just applying to school in the first place – as well as wanting to see more assistance from within post-secondary schools for this. For many of the youth who have been able to access band funding, that support has been fundamental to their success in education and highlights the need to extend sufficient funding to all Indigenous post-secondary students.

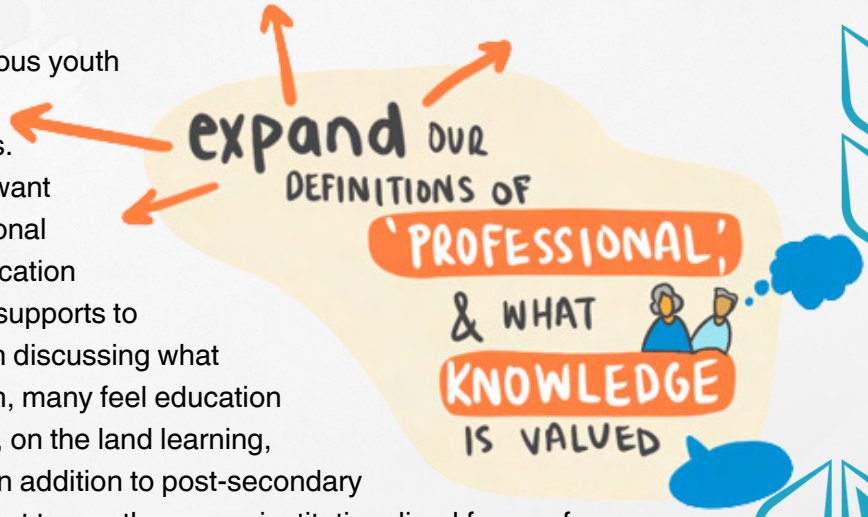
91%

of Indigenous youth said that they need financial assistance to support their educational goals.

> **Maybe you get funding for school, but it's only for your courses**
>
> and not living expenses so you still have to work. There should be more funding available, more resources to take care of other expenses so youth can focus on their education and living a balanced life.
>
> *-Victoria Sharing Circle Participant*

Many also reflected on the need to recognize lived experiences and traditional knowledge as valid forms of education, while calling for post-secondary spaces to be better tailored to Indigenous students. Several youth also talked about how more cultural and wellness supports should be provided by institutions to ensure that Indigenous young people are able to succeed in these spaces.

> **The structure of educational** spaces needs to be more fluid, especially for Indigenous students. There are so many different ways of learning/expressing knowledge. I struggle to relate my learning to credits and classes. There needs to be more accommodation for structure not looking a certain way.
>
> *-East Coast Online Sharing Circle Participant*



Overall, supports needed for Indigenous youth to succeed in educational institutions depend on a variety of circumstances. Generally though, Indigenous youth want to feel safe and supported in educational settings and as they pursue their education goals, they called for better financial supports to ensure their success. As noted, when discussing what education means to Indigenous youth, many feel education is about things like lived experiences, on the land learning, and learning your cultural traditions, in addition to post-secondary education. Indigenous youth often want to see these non-institutionalized forms of education recognized and adapted into post-secondary learning environments and valued on the same level as degrees and diplomas.

Indigenous Youth & Meaningful Work

Before beginning a conversation about how Indigenous youth relate to work and what they understand to be meaningful work, we explained that “work” in the context of this project is not limited to the labour we exchange for wages to survive our capitalist context. For the purposes of this study, work can include domestic labour, land defense and advocacy, volunteer and community work, and other forms of unpaid labour. We also asked youth to give us their definitions of “meaningful work” and to talk about what impacts they wanted to see from their work, and what supports they need to pursue work that is meaningful to them.

How do Indigenous youth define meaningful work and its impacts?

In reviewing survey answers to the question “how do you define meaningful work?,” wealth, finances, and money were not key elements of youth definitions, but community, giving back, and helping people were front and center. We also asked youth what kind of impacts they would like to see come from their labour, whether at the personal, community, national, or global levels. Their responses indicate a deep commitment to advocating for national and global change and improving their communities through working in healing and wellness, and by supporting youth, Indigenous women, and Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ youth. While these answers highlight diverse aspirations among the youth, they also indicate an intense focus on making a meaningful difference in their communities and beyond.

> **Meaningful work to me**
> means contributing for the advancement and betterment of my people and my community.
> *-Survey Participant*

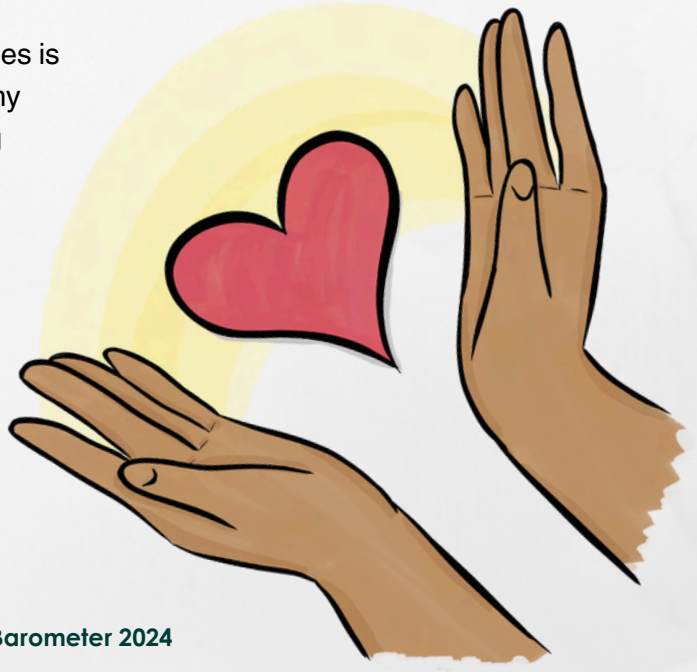
> **Meaningful work for me is when I am doing something that feels good to my spirit**
> and helps me sustain a modest lifestyle, like affording a place to live close to nature, nutritional food, and lots of personal time.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

Many Indigenous youth also expressed a desire to support younger generations, especially through mentorship roles that help youth connect with their cultural heritage and feel supported and confident in their decisions. Youth also expressed wanting to help other young people navigate violent colonial systems like the child welfare system.

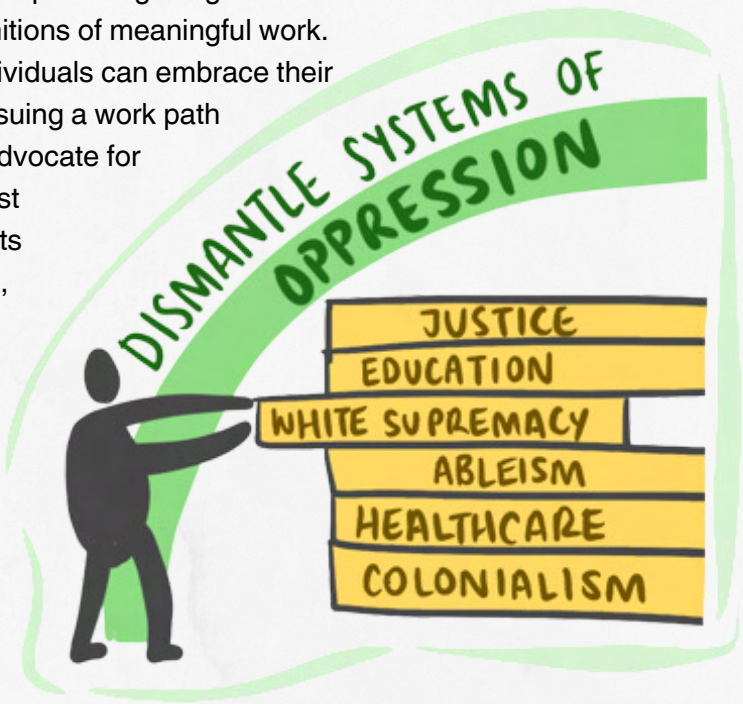
Several participants focused on meaningful work as advocacy that advances Indigenous rights and holds the Canadian government accountable for past and ongoing violence and discrimination. Some youth talked about this in the context of working to create systemic change through policy work and advocacy, and many talked about it in relation to land defense and activism.

> **I want to be a safe person**
> for younger youth in care. I want to hold empathy and be able to help guide them in a way that best supports their decisions, without holding judgment.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

Promoting healing and wellness within Indigenous communities is another strong thematic concern in the survey response. Many Indigenous youth aspire to support mental health and healing journeys, both personally and for others.



Supporting Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ communities and empowering Indigenous women was also a key impact and part of youth's definitions of meaningful work. Participants want to create inclusive spaces where individuals can embrace their identities without fear, and some also spoke about pursuing a work path that allows them to advocate for gender equality and advocate for more Indigenous women in decision-making roles. Most importantly, youth's ideas about meaningful work and its impacts were not money-centered but rooted in values, connection, relationships, and holistic health.



Most fundamentally, meaningful work resonates with who I am as an Indigenous person.

It flows from my identity, empowers my self-determination and aligns with my community's needs and aspirations.

-Survey Participant

I like to see more healing and growing as an impact from the work that I do/will do.

I want to feel that impact on myself and others. I want to have an impact of acceptance and vulnerability to being a two-spirit Inuk in an urban life on the people around me and on myself.

-Survey Participant

What supports do Indigenous youth need to pursue meaningful work?

In asking youth what supports they need to find or maintain meaningful work, the top choice was social, emotional, or cultural supports. The next most selected supports were having a safe and supportive work environment; mentors, job coaches or job shadowing programs; Indigenous youth job training programs; and Indigenous-led career opportunities.

Top 5 supports needed for youth to pursue meaningful work:

52% Social, emotional, or cultural supports

52% Having a safe or supportive work environment

51% Mentors, job coaches, or job shadowing programs

51% Indigenous youth job training programs

45% Indigenous-led career opportunities

Across First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth, the most frequently identified supports needed for Indigenous youth to pursue meaningful work was social, emotional, or cultural supports; having a safe and supportive work environment; mentors, job coaches or job shadowing programs; Indigenous youth job training programs; and Indigenous-led career opportunities. Notably, Inuit youth included having access to Indigenous-led career opportunities in their top 3 supports, where First Nations and Métis youth did not. Métis youth ranked having a safe or supportive work environment higher than First Nations and Inuit youth did.

First Nations Youth

said they need these supports to pursue meaningful work:

1. Social, emotional or cultural supports (53%)
2. Indigenous youth job training programs (50%)
3. Mentors, job coaches or job shadowing programs (50%)

Inuit Youth

said they need these supports to pursue meaningful work:

1. Indigenous-led career opportunities (58%)
2. Indigenous youth job training programs (56%)
3. Having a safe or supportive work environment (53%)

Métis Youth

said they need these supports to pursue meaningful work:

1. Having a safe or supportive work environment (59%)
2. Mentors, job coaches or job shadowing programs (56%)
3. Social, emotional or cultural supports (53%)

Youth in the territories were more likely to cite upgrading essential skills and career information and advice as a key support needed for them. Relatedly, youth living in remote, rural, and on-reserve communities reported needing access to Indigenous youth job training programs at a higher rate than youth living in urban communities. For youth living in urban communities, 48% said that they need Indigenous youth job training programs, compared to 59% of youth living in rural or remote areas, and 54% of youth living on-reserve.

Notably, 37% of people with a disability identified universal basic income as one of the most needed supports to pursue meaningful work, compared to 17.2% of people without a disability.

Overall, most Indigenous youth surveyed (76%) felt optimistic about the meaningful work opportunities being made available to them and other Indigenous youth in the future. When looking at how different demographics responded to this question, some youth were less likely to say that they feel optimistic about these opportunities being made available.

Youth living with disabilities

said they need these supports to pursue meaningful work:

1. Social, emotional or cultural supports (57%)
2. Having a safe or supportive work environment (55%)
3. Mentors, job coaches or job shadowing programs (47%)
4. Indigenous-led career opportunities (44%)
5. Indigenous youth job training programs (42%)
6. Universal basic income (37%)

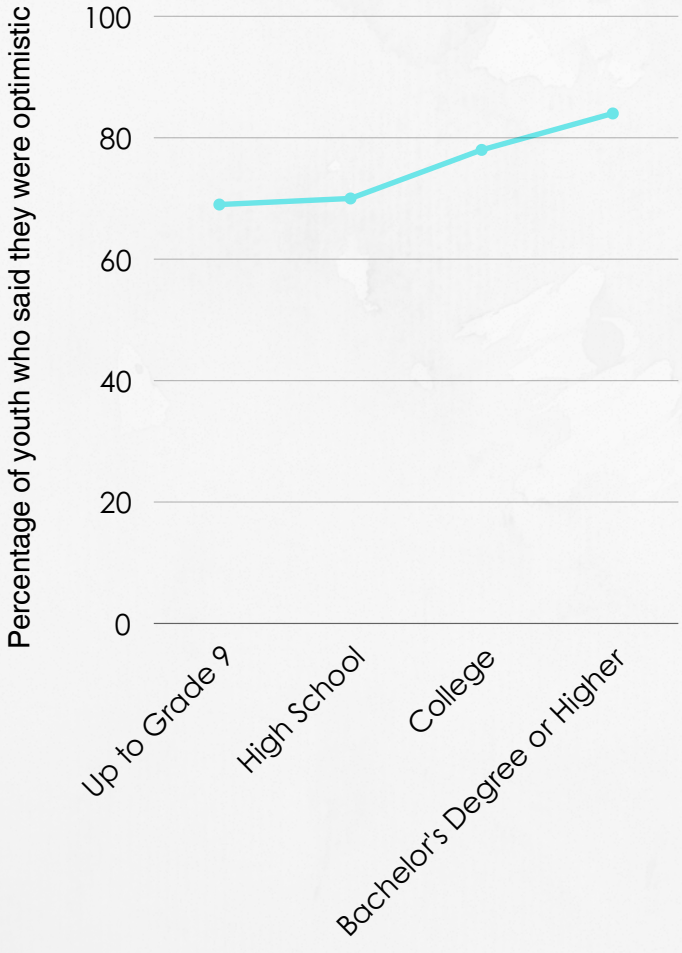
37%

of survey participants with a disability identified universal basic income as one of their most needed supports to pursue meaningful work, compared to 17.2% of participants without a disability.



Notably, youth with a higher level of education tend to say they feel more optimistic about meaningful work opportunities in the future. As we revealed earlier in this report, youth place more importance on learning through lived experiences rather than traditional institutions, and this imbalance in optimism may reflect how society and institutions continue to put more emphasis and supports around traditional forms of education and work.

Education Level of Indigenous Youth Surveyed Compared with Optimism Toward Meaningful Work Opportunities



76%

of all survey participants said that they feel optimistic about meaningful work opportunities in the future.

Indigenous youth less likely to feel optimistic about meaningful work opportunities being made available to them:

- Afro-Indigenous youth (63%)
- Youth living in Nunavut (64%)
- Youth living in the Yukon (64%)
- Youth living in Prince Edward Island (67%)*
- Youth living in Alberta (67%)
- Youth who are living with or are unsure if they are living with a disability (67%)

Indigenous youth more likely to feel optimistic about meaningful work opportunities being made available to them:

- Youth living in the Northwest Territories (100%)*
- Youth living in New Brunswick (81%)
- Youth living in Quebec (88%)
- Métis youth (81%)
- Cisgender men (80%)
- Transgender men (82%)
- Transgender women (90%)

**There were low amounts of responses from youth in these locations*

Indigenous Youth Defining Success & the Future of Education and Work

In discussing what education and meaningful work look like to Indigenous youth, we also asked youth how they envision the future of education and meaningful work. Throughout these conversations, supporting community and being a mentor for the generations coming up remained a huge part of success for youth. Looking to the future, youth remained focused on thinking generations ahead in terms of building community supports and capacity. Youth also envision low and no-barrier education, and workplaces that are culturally safe.

> **Success in work and education is setting goals in those places** and working towards them and learning then adapting your goals based on your new knowledge. Work that will have an impact to a community. The impacts will benefit the community no matter how big or small that benefit is.
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant*

What does success in education and work mean to Indigenous youth?

Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, when asked to select what success in education and work means to them, youth most frequently said "working toward the advancement of Indigenous peoples." The top five most selected definitions were:

54% Working toward the advancement of Indigenous peoples

53% Being in a position to help out my family and community

52% Being a role model to family and/or community members

42% Being able to focus on collective success rather than individual gain

41% Building meaningful relationships with my family, peers, and communities

When looking at how youth responded based on Indigenous identity, the five most selected options were largely aligned with the responses noted above. A divergence is visible when looking at responses from First Nations and Métis youth, where achieving financial stability was included at the fourth and fifth most selected response, respectively. Achieving financial stability was also an important definition of success to Two-Spirit youth, with this option being the third most selected.

Some different selections also emerged when looking at how youth responded based on province or territory. Here, youth living in Newfoundland and Labrador more frequently said that having the flexibility to balance life and career is part of their definition of success, at the fourth most selected option for these youth. An important distinction that emerged was that youth living in the territories were more likely to include achieving financial stability in their top five definitions of success. For most provinces, this definition did not appear in the top five, and when it did was ranked fourth or fifth (Prince Edward Island and Manitoba). For youth living in the territories, achieving financial stability was either the second or third most selected definition.

Additionally, when looking at how youth responded based on the type of community they live in some responses shift in terms of importance, with achieving financial stability also being seen as a definition of success for some youth here. How youth responded based on their community type is outlined below.

> **“Success in education is less about what you’ve learned, and more about how you’ve grown.**
>
> Less about learning all the information and know it exactly, more about growing as a person and broadening your perspective of the world and how it works around you/how you interact with it.”
>
> *-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant*



Top Definitions of Success, by Geographic Type

Geographic Type	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Urban	Working toward the advancement of Indigenous people	Being in a position to help out my family and community	Being a role model to family members and/or community members	Achieving financial stability	Building meaningful relationships with family, peers and community
Remote or Rural	Being a role model to family members and/or community members	Being in a position to help out my family and community	Working toward the advancement of Indigenous people	Being able to focus on collective success rather than individual gain	Achieving financial stability
On-Reserve	Being a role model to family members and/or community members	Being in a position to help out my family and community	Working toward the advancement of Indigenous people	Being able to focus on collective success rather than individual gain	Building skills in order to contribute to my community's success
Prefer not to say	Having flexibility to balance a life and career	Being a role model to family members and/or community members	Building skills in order to contribute to my community's success	Working toward the advancement of Indigenous people	Achieving financial stability

Youth living with a disability also tended to respond differently to this question. For them, being in a position to help out family and community was the most selected response, with working toward the advancement of Indigenous peoples being next. Achieving financial stability was also in the top five most selected definitions for youth living with a disability at number four. Their top five most selected responses are outlined below.

Top Definitions of Success, by Disability Status

Disability Status	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
No	Working toward the advancement of Indigenous people	Being a role model to family members and/or community members	Being in a position to help out my family and community	Being able to focus on collective success rather than individual gain	Building meaningful relationships with family, peers and community
Yes or Unsure	Being in a position to help out my family and community	Working toward the advancement of Indigenous people	Being a role model to family members and/or community members	Achieving financial stability	Building meaningful relationships with family, peers and community
Prefer not to say	Achieving financial stability	Having flexibility to balance life and career	Building meaningful relationships with family, peers and community	Working toward the advancement of Indigenous people	Being a role model to family members and/or community members

We also asked youth in the sharing circles about what success in education and work looks like to them. In these spaces, youth often shared that they want to see their work and education impact their communities in a positive way. Some youth shared that they hope that they can pass along their knowledge and skills to other Indigenous youth and people in their communities. Many also talked about how working or learning in a space that respects their Indigeneity is part of success for them. Several participants talked about goals that they have for working in spaces that are a shift from the traditional nine-to-five type of work and that move away from the typical colonial environments of many workplaces.

> **Success in education/work doesn't mean becoming part of a society that's nine to five,** but I'd like to see more land-based learning and hands-on skill development. Everyone's brain learns differently. Success is recognizing everyone's unique abilities and providing an environment in which everyone can flourish.
>
> *-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant*

> **A successful education space would be inclusive and adaptable** to those most discriminated against by colonialism and systemic racism, especially those excluded by disabilities who have so many more barriers to accessing those spaces equitably.
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle*



For many youth, success in education and work is more than finding a job with good pay. In the sharing circles, youth often talked about how success in education and work for them means being able to grow personally. Participants also shared about how a successful job or education would align with their passions and interests, while allowing them to help their communities and pass on knowledge as mentioned previously. Another common theme that emerged was that Indigenous youth often feel like success in education and work is tied to their ability to have a work-life balance and being able to participate in cultural activities without worrying about repercussions from time off from work or school.

> **"There's this colonial mindset, we've been conditioned to believe what work means or looks like.**
> But as Indigenous peoples we go hunting for months, we harvest, work in cycles, work is seasonal. Meaningful work is being able to survive without worrying [financially] while also maintaining work-life balance. What you do for community is what matters."
>
> *-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant*

In all of our engagements, Indigenous youth shared a wide range of thoughts and stories about how they see success in work and education. Overall, youth often described success as being able to contribute to their communities while growing personally, as exemplified in the survey responses. Things like financial stability were also important pieces of success to many youth, while still being able to maintain a work-life balance and be able to take time away to participate in cultural activities.



How do Indigenous youth envision the future of education and meaningful work?

In the sharing circles, we asked Indigenous youth about what opportunities in work and education they would like to be made available five to ten years from now for themselves and other Indigenous youth. Youth shared their visions for work and education, often imagining a future where these spaces are reshaped and decolonized. Some youth talked about wanting to see things like land-based learning incorporated into education, while others shared visions of a future where work and education are flexible and tailored to an individual's needs.

When talking about the future of education specifically, youth frequently discussed wanting to see a future without barriers to accessing it. Many talked about wanting to see the financial burdens of education be eased in the future, either through increased access scholarships and grants or by eliminating tuition all together. Some also brought up the need to remove barriers for people living with a disability to access education, saying that the structure of education now often does not set up these students to succeed. Many talked about envisioning a future where there are more Indigenous-led programs at educational institutions, and where education is accessible to youth living in all areas of the country.

Youth often talked about wanting to see a future where Indigenous students at all levels have proper wellness and cultural supports in place and supports to help them navigate through their educational journey.

> **"Standards of professionalism should be abolished.**
>
> I would like to see it acknowledged that all hair types, all tattoos, all cultural identities and expressions can be professional."
>
> *-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant*

> **"There should be someone to help Indigenous students at high schools to help with post-secondary information.**
>
> Indigenous student groups should be more implemented at universities, so you are more supported with access to medicines, Elders, etc."
>
> *-Halifax Sharing Circle Participant*

When discussing the future of work specifically, youth often brought up how they want to see a future where the current Western idea of professionalism isn't the standard. Many also expressed their desire to see more flexible workplaces that promote the wellness of their employees. For many Indigenous youth, workplaces that are more aligned to Indigenous ways of being are a strong desire for the future.

> **Looking at a decolonized idea of what 'school' is, such as taking kids on the land**
> and teaching them how to skin a deer. Teaching what was once common knowledge.
> *-Halifax Sharing Circle Participant*

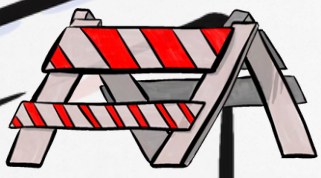
> **Two things that have been huge for me in meaningful work:**
> Remote work - being able to show up as I am that day. My value and work does not change based on how I show up, what I wear, etc. Allowing people to express themselves however they want is really important because those things do not equal who you are and what you're capable of. Flexible hours – being able to be in a meeting and log off or go for a walk to recuperate from Zoom fatigue has been helpful for managing neurodivergence and mental health.
> *-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant*

The Indigenous youth that we spoke with in the sharing circles have visions of a future where they are supported and encouraged in their education and workplaces. Many have called for a shift away from the current standard and want to see things change so they and other youth can achieve their visions of success in these areas without sacrificing their overall health.

TAKEAWAYS:
EDUCATION AND MEANINGFUL WORK

STRENGTHS

- For Indigenous youth, meaningful work has to include helping people and/or giving back to their communities, including by becoming mentors, role models, and safe spaces for other Indigenous youth and children.
- Most Indigenous youth feel optimistic about opportunities for education and meaningful work being made available to them and other Indigenous youth in the future (76% for meaningful work and 80% for education)
- Indigenous youth overall see working toward the advancement of Indigenous people as the most important metric of success, as well as helping out their family and communities and focusing on collective success over individual gain
- For the youth that have been able to access it, First Nations band funding has been crucial to their ability to access post-secondary education



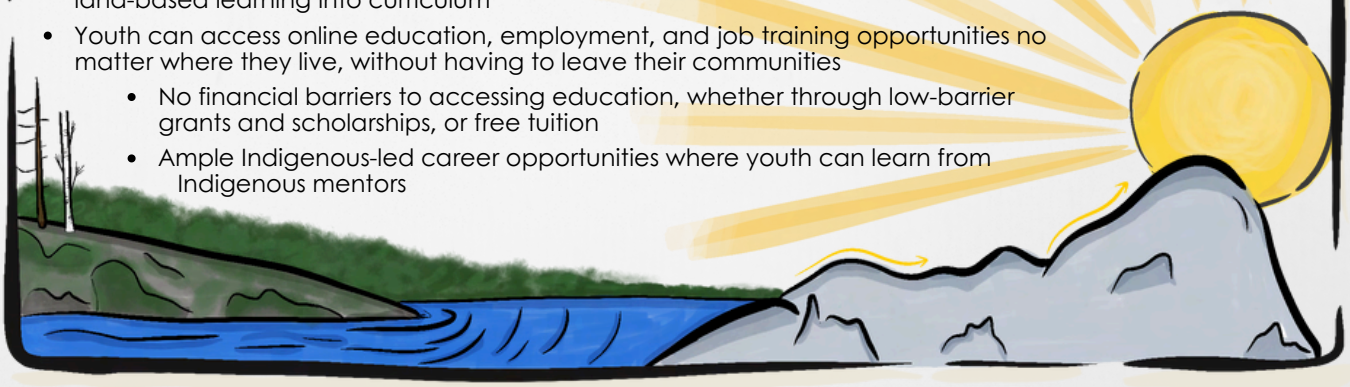


NEEDS & GAPS

- Indigenous youth need safe and supportive work environments, more Indigenous mentors, and more Indigenous-led career opportunities
- Youth living in remote, rural, and on-reserve communities need access to more Indigenous youth job training programs
- More opportunities needed for online and/or local education, so that youth don't have to leave their communities for education
- Lived experiences and other learning avenues outside of traditional institutions are not recognized by schools and workplaces as being valid
- Indigenous youth are calling for subsidized housing near schools, particularly for Indigenous students living in the North
- More financial assistance for post-secondary education, with less stringent requirements, more accessible application processes and criteria
- Youth from some demographics are more likely to say that achieving financial stability is an important part of success to them

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- All forms of education and knowledge are recognized by schools and employers as valuable, including the lived experiences and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples
- Schools and workplaces have shifted away from Western standards, prioritizing flexibility and wellness (such as by allowing Indigenous youth time away to participate in cultural activities, and incorporating land-based learning into curriculum
- Youth can access online education, employment, and job training opportunities no matter where they live, without having to leave their communities
- No financial barriers to accessing education, whether through low-barrier grants and scholarships, or free tuition
- Ample Indigenous-led career opportunities where youth can learn from Indigenous mentors



THEME 4

Reconciliation & Solidarity



THEME 4

Reconciliation and Solidarity

Indigenous Youth Reflecting on Reconciliation

In our final section of questions, we asked Indigenous youth to share what reconciliation looks like to them, if it is important to them, if they think it is possible, and how committed they feel different sectors are to reconciliation. It is important to acknowledge that some Indigenous youth do not think reconciliation is possible, and that a wide range of definitions of reconciliation exist. As the term 'reconciliation' itself can often be inaccessible, we provided the following definition of reconciliation to the youth we engaged with to ground the conversation in a shared understanding:

RECONCILIATION

generally refers to the establishment and maintaining of a respectful, just, and equal relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. We understand that everyone may have a different definition of reconciliation, or different thoughts on how it can be achieved – and if it can be achieved at all.

What does reconciliation mean to Indigenous youth?

In the survey, we asked Indigenous youth about the top five most applicable definitions of reconciliation for them. When looking at responses across all Indigenous youth surveyed, the top selected definitions were honouring treaties, Land Back, self-governance for all Indigenous peoples, ending institutional racism, and access to education.

Indigenous youth's top 5 definitions of reconciliation:

70% Honouring Treaties

67% Land Back

52% Ending all instiutional racism

48% Self-governance for all Indigenous Peoples

46% Access to education



While most Indigenous youth responded similarly to above, when looking at the responses from different demographics of Indigenous youth some other definitions of reconciliation begin to emerge. Inuit and Métis youth said that being safe generally is an important part of reconciliation to them, with this showing up as the fourth most selected definition for these youth.

Many gender-diverse youth also included climate justice within their definition of reconciliation, with Two-Spirit, Two-Spirit+, transgender women and non-binary/agender youth more frequently included climate justice within their definition. Notably, people identifying as Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ generally were more likely to include climate justice in their top five, and Two-Spirit+ youth were more likely to include abolishing the Indian Act within theirs. Transgender men also more frequently selected being safe generally as a definition of reconciliation to them, showing up as the fifth most selected response by these youth.

2019 Barometer Comparison

In the 2019 Barometer, Indigenous youth were asked what the word "reconciliation" means to them in application to relations between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people living in Canada. The most commonly reported themes were:

- *Rebuilding relationships / trust - 30% (including learning to get along and/or work together, building trust and respect, and mending relations)*
- *Apology / Making amends - 20% (including acknowledging the past and past wrongs, apologizing, seeking forgiveness, and making amends)*
- *Repairing / Correcting past wrongs - 14%*

Indigenous women responding to the question were twice as likely to cite apologizing and making amends as part of their definition of reconciliation (26% compared to 13%) and nearly half of Inuit participants cited rebuilding relationships and trust as key parts of their definition.

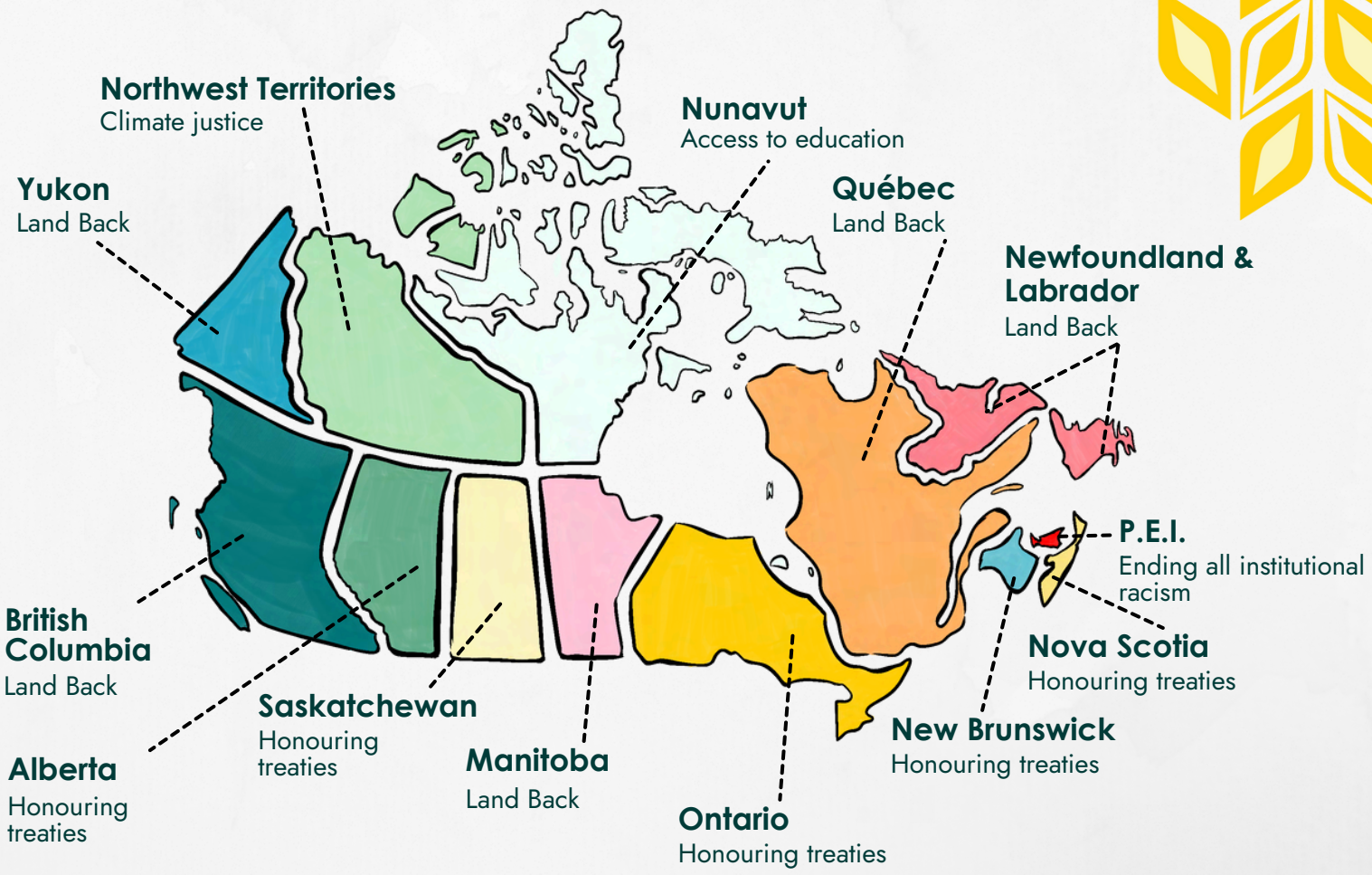
Notably, only 2% mentioned money as part of their understanding of reconciliation, and 36% could not answer the question at all.

Top definitions of reconciliation by Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ status

Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+	Top 1	Top 2	Top 3	Top 4	Top 5
No	Honouring treaties	Land Back	Ending all institutional racism	Self-governance for all Indigenous peoples	Access to education
Unsure	Honouring treaties	Land Back	Access to education	Being safe generally	Self-governance for all Indigenous peoples
Yes	Land Back	Honouring treaties	Self-governance for all Indigenous peoples	Ending all institutional racism	Climate justice
Prefer not to say	Land Back	Honouring treaties	Climate justice	Access to education	Being safe generally

We can also see some divergences when reviewing responses from different provinces and territories. While most of the more frequently selected definitions still show up in the top five responses for youth from different provinces and territories, the order of these varied with some other responses like climate justice and being safe generally emerging as well.

Youth from Prince Edward Island and the Northwest Territories were more likely to include climate justice within their definition. Youth from Nunavut most frequently included access to education in their definition of reconciliation and uniquely also included reparations. There was little difference between how youth responded based on which community type they live in (urban, rural or remote, or on-reserve) and the overall responses outlined at the start of this section. We can see in the map below the top response from youth living in each province or territory.



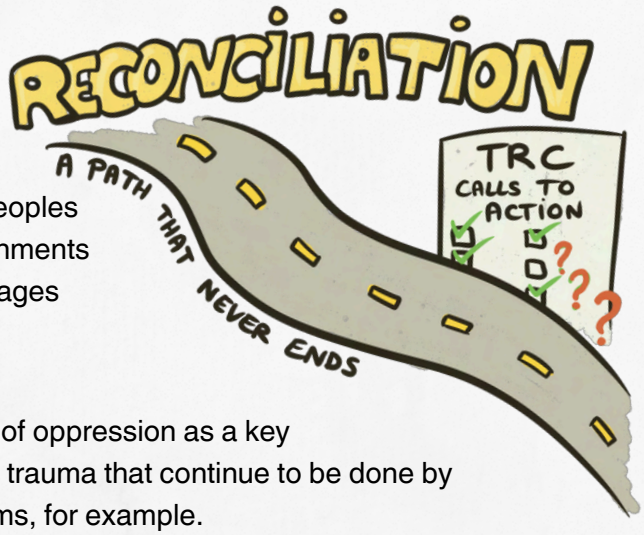
Responses from youth who identified as having a disability (or were unsure) had similar responses to those who did not, and to the overall responses outlined above, while also including climate justice as part of their definitions more frequently. Climate justice was the fifth most selected definition of reconciliation for youth living with a disability.

When talking with youth in the sharing circles about their thoughts on reconciliation, a theme that emerged is the need to remember and center the “truth" in “truth and reconciliation.” For many Indigenous youth, education of the public about the legacy of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, the Millennial Scoop, and other acts of genocide inflicted against Indigenous peoples is very important. It was emphasized by some youth that this education is not the responsibility of Indigenous peoples and is instead the responsibility of individuals. Several youth expressed that actions of reconciliation cannot be meaningful until all of the truth is shared.

> **There is ‘Truth’ in Truth and Reconciliation and people forget that.**
> [...] Sweeping the truth aspect and going straight to reconciliation it’s like going backwards. Reconciliation, I see it as agreements between communities, nations, governments. The *truth* part has more impact on individual level. With reconciliation you have to pressure the government with treaties or agreements or policies, which causes a lot of misinformation and fear. I get nervous about how non-Indigenous people shy away from truth or think maybe I will turn them off if I speak the truth. They realize they don’t know a lot and they get scared of how much they don’t know.
>
> *-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant*



Some other ways Indigenous youth described reconciliation in the sharing circles, and actions that feel like reconciliation to them include:



- An ongoing process, not a checklist
- The acknowledgement of history
- Moving away from stereotypes and misinformation
- Putting in effort to learn about the history of Indigenous peoples
- An agreement between communities, nations, and governments
- Being able to practice culture and speak traditional languages
- Feeling safe
- Going beyond land acknowledgements

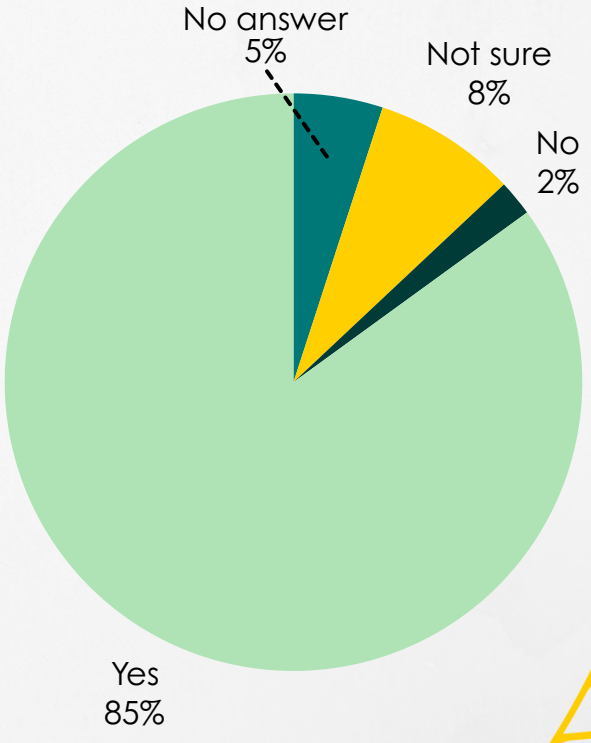
Many youth also talked about the need to dismantle systems of oppression as a key part of reconciliation. Youth often talked about the harms and trauma that continue to be done by institutions like the child welfare system and education systems, for example.

Is reconciliation important to Indigenous youth?

85% of Indigenous youth who completed the survey said that reconciliation is important to them. Only 2% of Indigenous youth responded saying no, with 8% being unsure and 5% preferring not to say.

85%

of Indigenous youth said that reconciliation is important to them. Only 2% of Indigenous youth responded saying no, 8% were unsure and 5% preferred not to say.



How are we supposed to reconcile

when the basic needs aren't met across our people?

-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant



When looking at how youth from different Indigenous identities responded, responses are very similar to the overall responses outlined above with still only 2% or less of youth in each Indigenous identity saying that reconciliation wasn't important to them. Additionally, responses were very similar when looking at how youth responded based on gender and whether they identified as Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+, as well as whether youth identified as living with a disability.

Youth also responded similarly when looking at responses by province or territory, except for youth living in Saskatchewan, where 12% of youth said that reconciliation is not important to them. Responses from youth based on the type of community they live in (urban, rural or remote, or on-reserve) were also similar to the responses across all Indigenous youth. Here, a slight variance can be seen when looking at the responses from youth living on-reserve, where 78% said that reconciliation was important to them, with 3% responding no, 9% being unsure, and 10% preferring not to answer.

Reconciliation can be used to hold people accountable.

I think reconciliation should be grounded in healing, rest, self-determination, reparations, and land back for Indigenous peoples.

-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant

Reconciliation is important.

In media we see so much pushback for things to be recognized like MMIWG. Things like that make me wonder if we will ever get there. We are opening our eyes to the bigger picture. We are going to be the generation that changes things. How many of our voices will be there?

-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant

Overall, regardless of where they live, the vast majority of participants said that reconciliation was important to them. Many youth also echoed this in the sharing circles, saying that to them, reconciliation is an important step in healing from the past and ensuring that Indigenous peoples are treated equitably. While talking about how reconciliation is important, some youth also questioned if it can happen at all.

Conversely, some youth shared that reconciliation is not important to them or is not a priority. For some Indigenous youth, focusing on healing within their own communities was more important. For others, reconciliation was not possible while many Indigenous communities still lack the necessities to live like clean drinking water and safe housing, saying this needs to happen before anything else can.

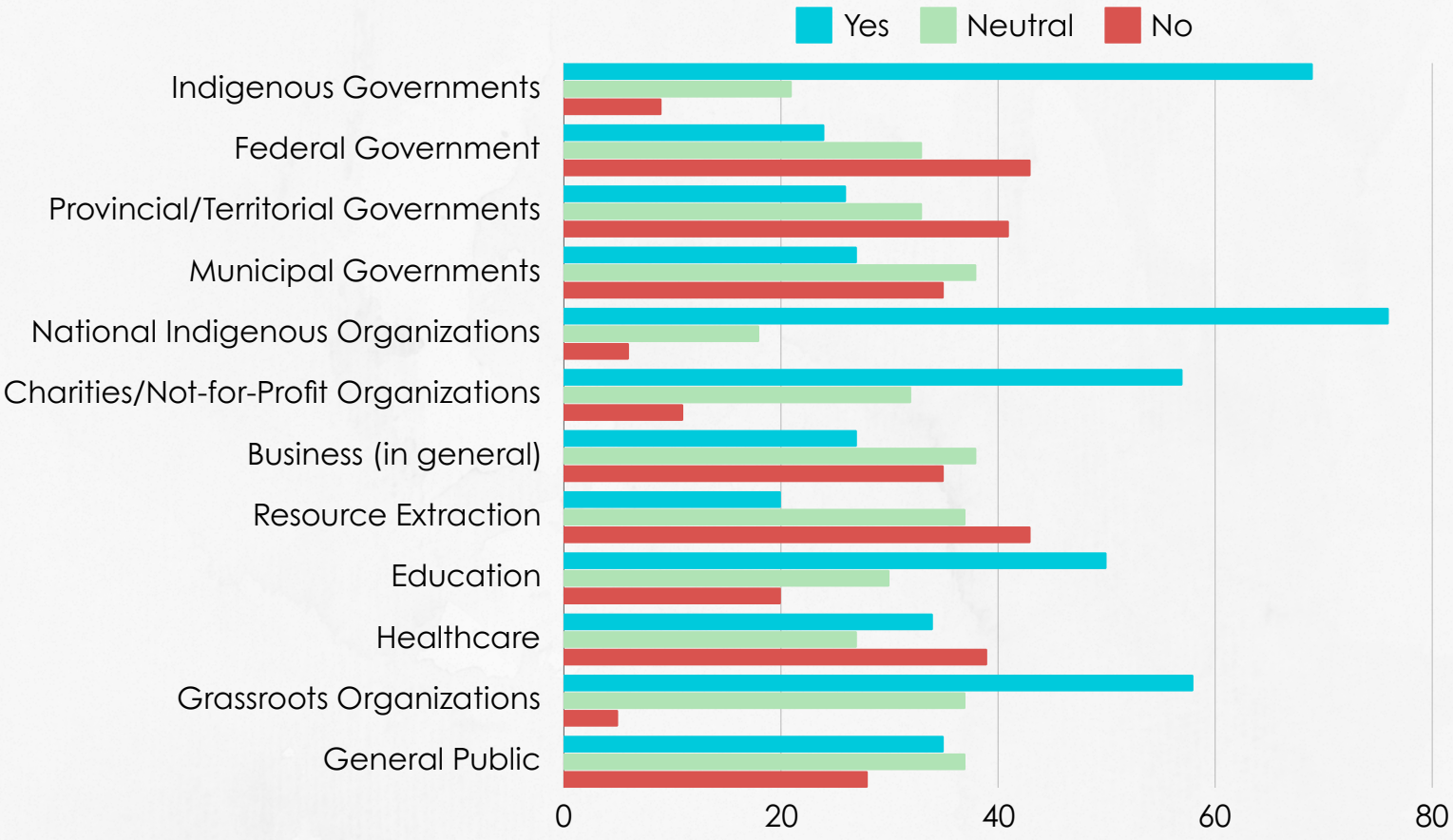
> **Reconciliation is important to me but is it fully achievable?**
>
> I worry that fully ending racism and stereotypes is not achievable. There are definitely actions that are achievable but how much support are you going to get if the racism is still prevalent?
>
> *-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant*

How do Indigenous youth see the future of reconciliation?

In the survey, we asked Indigenous youth about how committed they felt different sectors were to reconciliation. Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, only five sectors of twelve had 50% or more of Indigenous youth agreeing that they are committed to reconciliation. Of the sectors listed, Indigenous youth most frequently agreed that national Indigenous organizations are committed to reconciliation at 76%. This is followed by Indigenous governments, at 69%. The sectors that Indigenous youth did not identify as being committed to reconciliation most frequently were the federal government at 24% and provincial and territorial governments at 26%. Municipal governments and businesses followed this closely with 27% of youth believing these sectors are committed to reconciliation. The breakdown of responses across all Indigenous youth for each sector is outlined below.

In order to effectively visualize how Indigenous youth gauge the commitment of different sectors to reconciliation, their answers (which they selected on a scale from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*) have been reworded in the following bar graph and maps to *Yes, Neutral,* and *No*.

Are these sectors committed to reconciliation?



2019 Barometer Comparison

In the 2019 Barometer, Indigenous youth were asked if they had seen or were aware of specific examples of progress toward reconciliation, either where they live or elsewhere in the country. Over half said yes (54%), 31% said no, and 15% couldn't say.

Youth living in the Atlantic provinces were less likely to have seen specific examples of reconciliation (only 38% reported they had). Inuit and Métis youth also reported higher rates of seeing reconciliation progress than their First Nations peers.

When asked what examples of reconciliation they had seen, Indigenous youth most frequently mentioned:

- *apologies and acknowledgement for past wrongs (11%)*
- *government actions (10%)*
- *education and teaching about Indigenous issues in schools (10%)*
- *cultural programs and events (7%)*
- *compensation or cash payments (6%)*
- *land acknowledgements (5%)*
- *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (4%)*

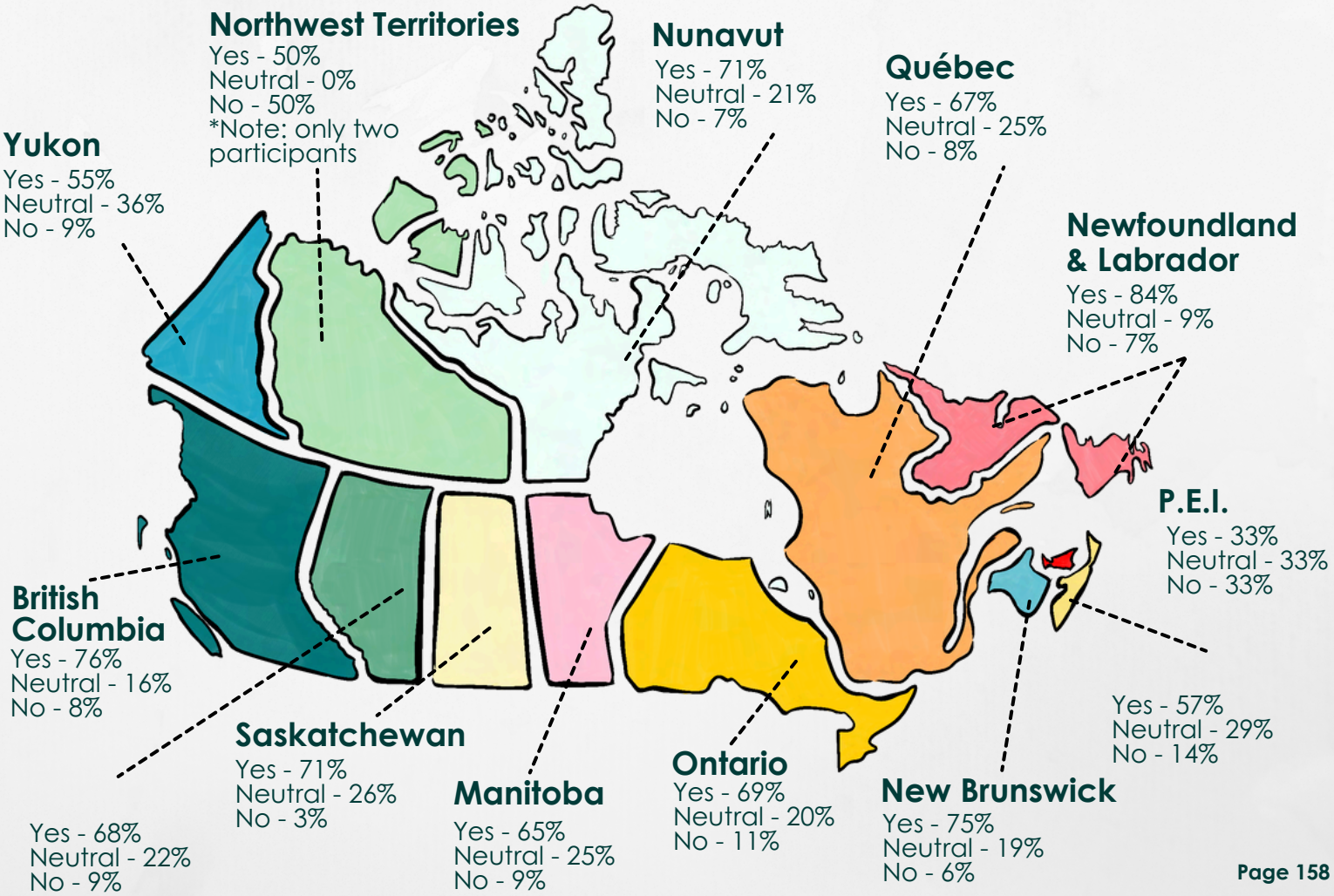
A significant number of Indigenous (33%) youth could not provide a specific response to the question.

We looked at how Indigenous youth responded to asking if Indigenous governments are committed to reconciliation by Indigenous identity, and responses varied slightly from across all identity groups, with Métis youth most frequently agreeing that Indigenous governments are committed to reconciliation.

Youth also tended to respond differently depending on which province or territory they live in, and youth in certain areas were less likely to agree that Indigenous governments are committed to reconciliation. Youth living in the Northwest Territories and Prince Edward Island were much more likely to disagree with the statement that Indigenous governments are committed to reconciliation. Additionally, youth living on-reserve only agreed 57% of the time that Indigenous governments are committed to reconciliation, compared to urban youth or youth living in remote and rural areas, with 70% and 75% agreeing, respectively.

Indigenous Identity	Strongly Agree/ Agree (Yes)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (Neutral)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (No)
First Nations	66%	25%	10%
Inuit	73%	17%	10%
Métis	80%	11%	9%
First Nations/ Métis	81%	12%	8%
My Indigenous identity is not listed here	100%	0%	0%
Prefer not to say	50%	50%	0%

Are Indigenous governments committed to reconciliation?

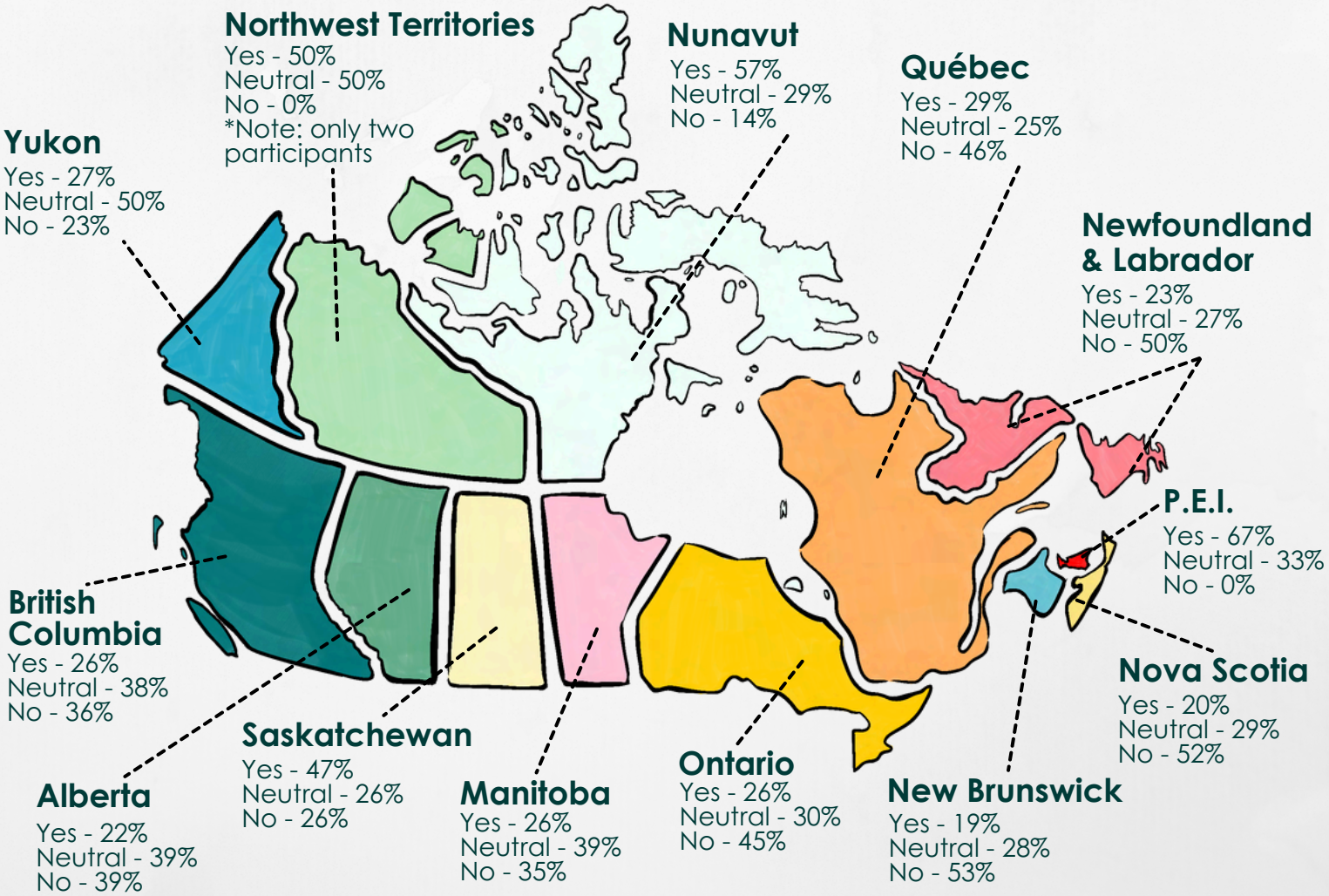


Most Indigenous youth do not believe that provincial or territorial governments are committed to reconciliation. When looking at how youth view provincial or territorial governments' commitment to reconciliation by their Indigenous identity, we can see that Inuit youth and Métis youth tended to agree more than the average that these governments are committed, and First Nations youth agreed less than the average.

Youth from some provinces and territories, such as Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan were much more likely to agree that provincial and territorial governments are committed to reconciliation.

Indigenous Identity	Strongly Agree/Agree (Yes)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (Neutral)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (No)
First Nations	22%	36%	42%
Inuit	36%	24%	40%
Métis	35%	31%	34%
First Nations /Métis	15%	31%	54%
My Indigenous identity is not listed here	67%	33%	0%
Prefer not to say	50%	0%	50%

Are provincial & territorial governments committed to reconciliation?



When examining responses from youth living in different community types, we can see that youth living on-reserve were less likely to agree that provincial or territorial governments are committed to reconciliation, with 21% of youth living in these areas agreeing. Youth living in rural or remote areas were more likely to agree that these governments are committed, with 34% agreeing. Urban Indigenous youth were well in line with the average responses, with 25% agreeing that provincial and territorial governments are committed to reconciliation.

This question revealed a noticeable difference in responses between those who identify as living with a disability and those who do not. Only 17% of Indigenous youth who are living with a disability, or are unsure if they are, agree that provincial or territorial governments are committed to reconciliation. Conversely, 32% of Indigenous youth who are not living with a disability agreed with the statement.

Disability Status	Strongly Agree/Agree (Yes)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (Neutral)	Strongly Disagree/Disagree (No)
No	32%	33%	35%
Yes/Unsure	17%	33%	50%
Prefer not to say	0%	50%	50%

We also dove deeper into how Indigenous youth responded to being asked if they felt the health sector was committed to reconciliation. When looking at how youth responded by Indigenous identity, First Nations and Inuit youth responses were in line with the average, with 33% and 34% agreeing, respectively. Métis youth tended to agree more that the health sector is committed to reconciliation, with 40% of Métis youth saying they strongly agree or agree.



Breaking down responses by gender, we can see that some youth are much less likely to agree that the health sector is committed to reconciliation. Here, Two-Spirit and Two-Spirit+ youth were far more likely to disagree, with only 21% and 14% agreeing, respectively. Non-binary and agender youth also tended to agree less that the health sector is committed to reconciliation, with 31% agreeing. Some youth were also more likely to agree that the health sector is committed, such as cisgender men, and transgender men and women. How youth responded based on their gender identity is outlined below.

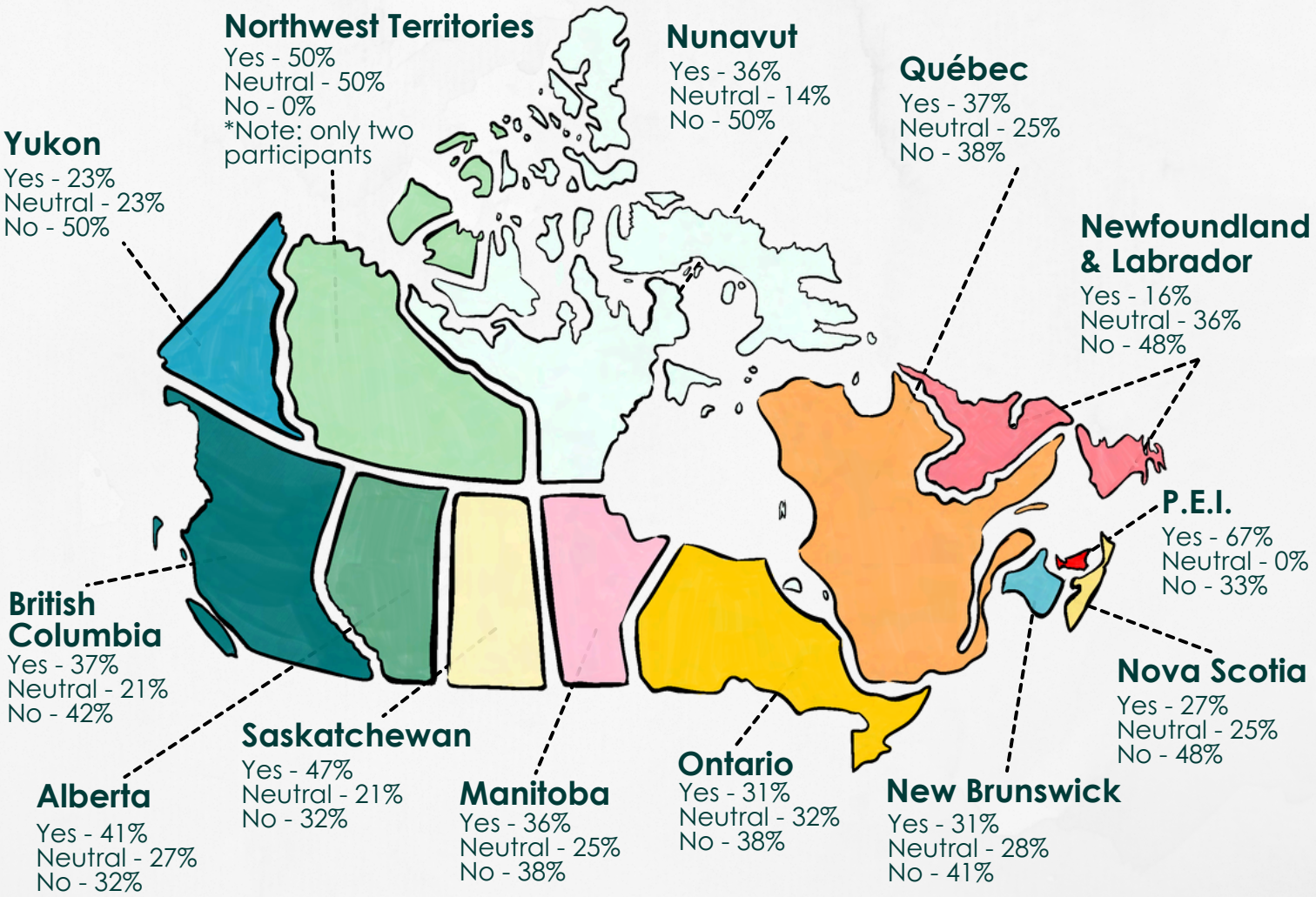
Gender Identity	Strongly Agree/Agree (Yes)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (Neutral)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (No)
Two-Spirit	21%	32%	46%
Two-Spirit+	14%	21%	65%
Cisgender men	53%	26%	22%
Cisgender women	30%	29%	41%
Cisgender+	33%	33%	33%
Gender not listed/Prefer not to say	38%	29%	33%
Non-Binary/Agender	31%	14%	55%
Transgender men	73%	18%	9%
Transgender women	80%	10%	10%
Transgender+	0%	50%	50%
Non-Binary+	0%	0%	100%

Additionally, youth who identified as Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ or were unsure were less likely to agree that the health sector is committed to reconciliation than those who did not. Here, 28% of youth who identified as Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ said that they agree the health sector is committed while 40% of youth who did not identify as Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+.

Reviewing answers by province and territory, we can see that health care institutions are not consistently committed to reconciliation from place to place. Youth living in Nunavut, the Yukon, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia were more likely to disagree that the health care sector is prioritizing reconciliation compared to other provinces and territories.

Additionally, when looking at how youth responded based on their community type (urban, remote or rural, or on-reserve), urban Indigenous youth and youth living in remote or rural areas responded in line with the average, with 34% and 35% agreeing, respectively. Youth living on-reserve agreed at slightly less than the average rate that the health sector is committed to reconciliation at 30%.

Is the healthcare sector committed to reconciliation?

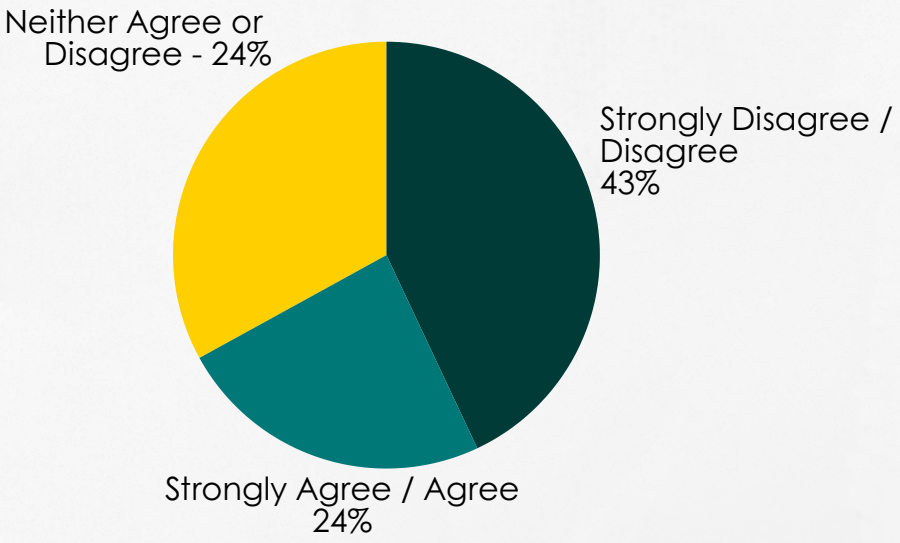


There is also a very stark difference between how youth that identified as living with a disability and those who did not respond to this question. Only 23% of Indigenous youth that said they are living with a disability agreed that the health sector is committed to reconciliation, while 41% of youth not living with a disability agreed.

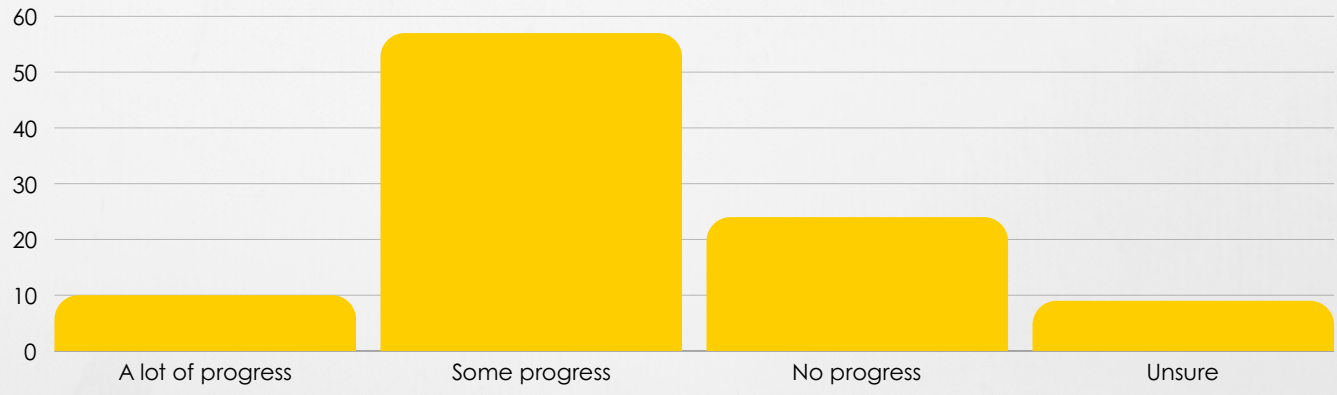
Disability Status	Strongly Agree/Agree (Yes)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (Neutral)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (No)
No	41%	27%	33%
Yes/Unsure	23%	28%	49%
Prefer not to say	8%	33%	58%

In addition to asking Indigenous youth if they felt the Government of Canada was committed to reconciliation, we also asked the youth whether they felt the Government of Canada had made any progress toward towards it. Only 10% of Indigenous youth felt like the Government of Canada has made a lot of progress toward reconciliation, 57% said that some progress had been made, and 24% said they felt no progress has been made.

Is the federal government committed to reconciliation?



How much progress has the government of Canada made towards reconciliation?



It's difficult trusting the government and higher powers.

How are we supposed to know you are keeping your words?

-Survey Participant

When reflecting on what their own communities have done in pursuit of reconciliation, youth often said that they felt their communities were committed to educating non-Indigenous peoples about their history and culture. Others talked about how their communities are engaging in land and treaty negotiations and have shown commitment to advocating for self-government and self-determination. Some youth also shared about how their communities are committed to the internal healing aspect of reconciliation.

When talking about the future of reconciliation in the sharing circles, youth often shared about how they felt like some actions of reconciliation were performative and stressed the need to move away from this. Some youth talked about the distrust that many Indigenous people have toward the Canadian government, saying that they are unsure if the government's actions are sincere. As noted above, only 10% of youth think that the Government of Canada has made significant progress in reconciliation, and only 24% agree that they are committed at all.

A partner that sees that the garbage is full should just take out the garbage.

Don't expect us to put in the labor to reconcile. The government saw it first, the government did this damage, they need to do the work. Land acknowledgements are performative. All the performative things don't matter – just give us the land back.

-Toronto Sharing Circle Participant

Others shared about how racism toward Indigenous people is still very prevalent and exists within our systems and with the general public. For many youth, their experiences of systemic racism have caused significant trauma, alongside the intergenerational trauma they were already carrying. Some youth shared that while they felt positively about the future of reconciliation and hoped it could happen someday, they felt exhausted by the need to reshare their stories of trauma repeatedly in wanting to be heard.



As mentioned previously, many Indigenous youth believe that reconciliation cannot be achieved until all Indigenous peoples have proper infrastructure and services and their basic needs are met, at the bare minimum. Several youth in the sharing circles talked about how they need to see these tangible improvements and want to see Indigenous peoples thriving rather than just surviving.

I would like to see the governments actually be held accountable.

I would like to see indigenous peoples actually listened to. I would like to see funding placed into communities and into our centres. Our cultural practices actually being respected.

-Survey Participant

I would like to see the government keep true on their promises.

I would like reservations have clean drinking water, access to resources in Northwest Territories. Mental, emotional and physical support in health spaces.

-Survey Participant

Many of these sentiments were echoed in the survey. We asked youth respondents to let us know what actions they would like to see in the next five to ten years toward reconciliation. They shared that they would like to see actions such as land back, reparations, having the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action fully implemented, systems and policy reform, and basic needs being met. Some also shared about wanting to see things like access to affordable housing for Indigenous people, Indigenous self-government, and full accountability for the Government of Canada.

We need more effective climate action worldwide, taxing the rich and returning these funds to Indigenous people as part of #LandBack, federal and provincial governments battling houselessness as a top priority, and subsidizing inflation costs, specifically on reserves where healthy food is already incredibly expensive.

-Survey Participant

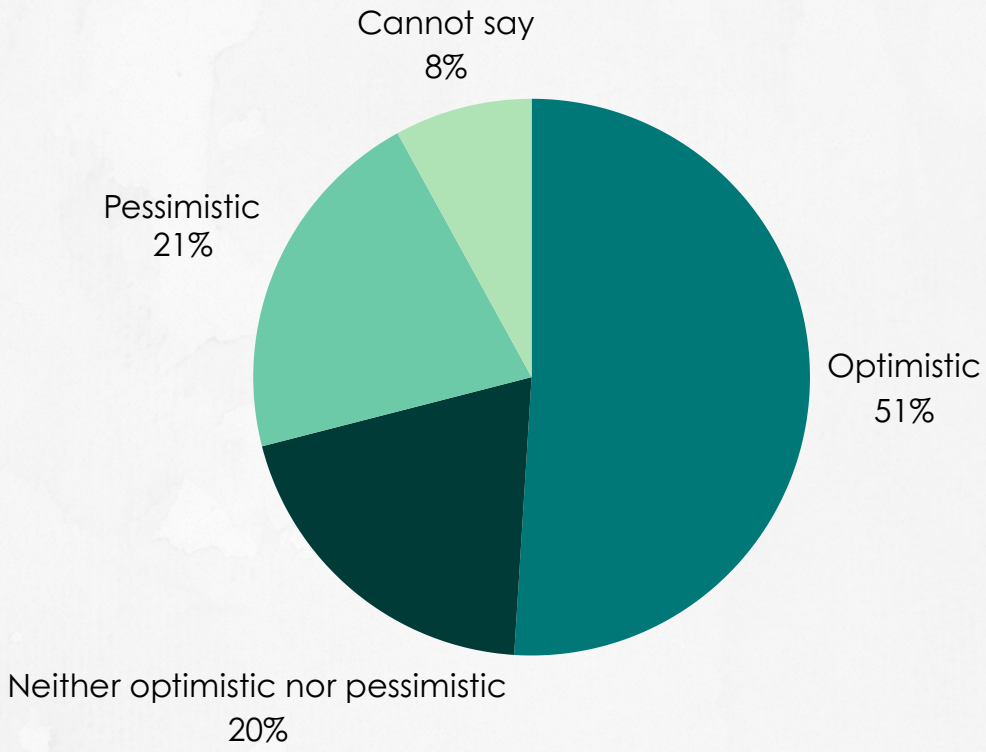
When talking about the future of reconciliation in both the sharing circles and survey, many shared about how their communities empower them, and that they believe Indigenous youth are important leaders in reconciliation and in their communities. While many pointed out that some sectors need to do a lot more work in reconciliation, Indigenous youth want to see these changes happen and are leading the path forward.



My community does a great job of trying to empower the youth in our community to be better leaders and role models from programming taking place.

-Survey Participant

We asked youth in the survey about how optimistic they felt about what actions they want to see toward reconciliation happening in the future. Across all Indigenous youth surveyed, 51% said they felt optimistic about these visions happening.



2019 Barometer Comparison

In the 2019 Barometer project, Indigenous youth were provided a list of potential barriers and asked to rate them as major, moderate, or minor barriers. Indigenous youth were most likely to point to myths and stereotypes about what Indigenous Peoples receive from Canada and a lack of political leadership to implement real change, followed by a lack of knowledge among non-Indigenous people, inadequate Indigenous control over lands and resources, socio-economic inequities, and an unwillingness to accommodate the needs of the other population. Least likely to be seen as a major barrier to reconciliation were different worldviews or values, and inadequate Indigenous control over the education of children and youth.

Despite this, three-quarters (75%) of Indigenous youth who participated in the 2019 Barometer said they were somewhat if not very optimistic about the prospect of meaningful reconciliation in their lifetime. Among Indigenous youth, strong optimism was most common among men, those living on-reserve, and those who have been involved in reconciliation activities.

Indigenous Youth Building Solidarity

As part of our discussions with youth about solidarity and allyship, we asked them to define what the concepts mean to them, how important they are to their lives, and what they want for the future(s) of allyship and solidarity. For the purposes of starting these discussions, we differentiated allyship as being white-settler specific and solidarity referring to unity and connection with other marginalized communities.

How do Indigenous youth define solidarity and allyship?

Indigenous youth in the sharing circles defined allyship as active support and understanding that do not center feelings of guilt. Others added to this, describing allyship as being held accountable and being comfortable with discomfort.

Youth in the sharing circles provided a range of examples of what solidarity and allyship mean to them in practice. These include supporting Indigenous businesses, artists, professionals, and frontline advocates as a practical way to practice solidarity and allyship. One participant shared an example of the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate working to bring cultural practices to schools in Yukon. Although they experienced some pushback initially, they are now welcomed by many schools. This kind of work takes time to implement and requires a willingness to support Indigenous initiatives on the institutional level.

> **[Allyship is] moving away from the guilt** to standing up for the Indigenous peers. Allyship shouldn't be pitiful…does your thought process go past being sorry? It is about showing up, understanding the land they are on, and understanding communities' needs.
>
> *-Montréal Sharing Circle Participant*

> **True solidarity is genuine, ongoing support that goes beyond** performative actions or token gestures. It's about respecting and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups while actively working to challenge and change systems of oppression.
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Sharing Circle Participant*

Many youth in the sharing circles described allyship and accountability as the responsibility of non-Indigenous Canadians to create pathways for inclusivity and using their privilege(s) to break down and challenge oppressive systems. Both allyship and solidarity should involve active listening, continuous education, and the amplification of Indigenous voices rather than prescribed methods to be an ally.

In a workplace setting, having non-Indigenous managers and supervisors who advocate for things like culture days can feel like allyship as well. Another youth from the sharing circles shared that allyship and solidarity mean promoting cultural sensitivity and standing against discrimination. One youth described this as a collaborative effort between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in unlearning, requiring non-Indigenous people to break down their own biases and stereotypes and for Indigenous people to revitalize their culture. Solidarity and allyship also extend beyond the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to newcomers to Canada. This solidarity often stems from shared experiences of trauma and colonization.

> **“Once you open up conversations with newcomers, you understand each other better.**
>
> They understand Indigenous people went through genocide because their community also experienced similar things. There is an understanding and solidarity that comes from the trauma ... Using dialogue and conversation is powerful to share views and foster understanding towards working or moving on the path of reconciliation.”
>
> *-Whitehorse Sharing Circle Participant*

How important are solidarity and allyship to Indigenous youth?

Asked whether solidarity with other marginalized communities is important to them, the overwhelming majority (73%) said yes, while 2% said no, 19% were unsure, and 6% chose not to answer. In looking at answers to this question by Indigenous identity, Métis youth had the highest rate of finding solidarity important (80%) while First Nations had the lowest (70%), with Inuit youth falling in the middle (75%). Notably, First Nations youth had the highest rate of uncertainty about whether solidarity was important at 22.1%, compared to 12.5% for Métis and 13.2% for Inuit.

In specifically reviewing answers from Afro-Indigenous youth, 83.3% reported that solidarity was important to them, while 16.7% reported that they were unsure. None of the Afro-Indigenous youth we surveyed felt that solidarity wasn't important to them.

Youth who identified as part of the Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ umbrella were far more likely than non-Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth to find solidarity with other marginalized communities important, with 80.9% saying yes, 1.4% saying no, and 12.2% being unsure. Comparatively, of the non-Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth, 65.2% said yes, 2.6% said no, and 26.1% were unsure, one of the higher rates of uncertainty among different demographic groups. Youth living with disabilities also agreed that solidarity was important to them more often than youth without.

	Yes	No	Unsure
First Nations	70.0%	1.3%	22.1%
Métis	80.0%	2.9%	12.5%
Inuit	75.0%	5.0%	13.0%
Afro-Indigenous	83.3%	0%	16.70%
Ages 18-22	63.9%	1.7%	25.8%
Ages 23-26	78.9%	1.6%	14.7%
Ages 27-29	72.6%	1.6%	19.1%
Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+	80.9%	1.4%	12.2%
Non-Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+	65.2%	2.6%	26.1%
Youth with disabilities	78.0%	1.2%	15.1%
Youth without disabilities	70.5%	2.3%	21.2%

When Indigenous youth were asked how often the community they belong to connects with other marginalized communities 19% said always, 41% said sometimes, 20% said rarely, 4% said never, and 16% selected “cannot say.” 42% of First Nations-identifying youth, 37% of Inuit-identifying youth, 43% of Métis-identifying youth, and 35% of First Nations and Métis-identifying youth report that “sometimes” the community they belong to connects with other marginalized communities. All groups reported low responses to “never” connecting with other marginalized groups (between 4 - 5%.) These ratios held largely true across Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+ status, province and territory, community type, genders, and disabilities.

Youth generally reported that settler allyship is important to them, citing a range of reasons. Some notable answers were having settler allies who use their positions of power to create spaces for Indigenous youth to lead and to amplify Indigenous voices, and because unity and support in numbers have the potential to create greater and faster change. Many youth also spoke to the pitfalls of settler allyship, especially when it becomes performative or superficial rather than meaningful.

> **“As an Indigenous person, I am cautious of settler allyship** because a lot of the time I've watched white settlers center themselves in the conversation or take up space/time from Indigenous people. Settler allyship is important to me when they center Indigenous peoples in the conversation or do immediate actions to support them like financially or giving up their position of power.”
>
> *-Survey Participant*

While acknowledging that settler allyship can be a useful tool in movements for Indigenous self-determination, youth also noted that it wasn't the most important thing, and some also stated that they are more invested in the relationships their communities build with other marginalized communities.

In addition to direct forms of racism, discrimination, and harassment, youth identified activities and practices that undermine solidarity such as:

- Tokenism
- Performative allyship (When white activist actions don't align with white activist words)
- Dismissing Indigenous experiences
- Cultural appropriation
- Commodification of Indigenous social justice causes

Activities and practices that undermine solidarity and allyship

would be ploys to make more money, social media trends surrounding 'every child matters' movements, and the disconnect from social media to real life. [...] Along with this, many settler companies have profited from Indigenous movements because of social media making it more of a trend than actually getting justice.

-Survey Participant



What do Indigenous youth want for the future of solidarity?

The youth in the sharing circles describe a vision for solidarity and allyship based on mutual respect and active participation in fostering meaningful relationships across communities. Youth often also brought up the need to go beyond land acknowledgements. For some youth, this means not just reading off a script, but learning about the land you are on, and actively giving back to the Indigenous communities whose land it is. One youth shared about how a land acknowledgement should include respectful engagement, while others shared examples of what giving to Indigenous communities can look like.

> **Solidarity and allyship with the Inuit should involve active listening, learning about their culture, and advocating for their rights** while respecting their autonomy. It means amplifying Inuit voices, promoting cultural sensitivity, and standing against discrimination. On the other side, it shouldn't involve patronizing attitudes, tokenism, ignoring issues, assuming homogeneity, or centering oneself in the process. Genuine allyship requires continuous effort, humility, and commitment to understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by Inuit communities. Involve active listening, learning about their culture, and advocating for their rights while respecting their autonomy.
>
> *-Inuit Nunangat Online Sharing Circle Participant*

In the survey, we also asked Indigenous youth about what actions they would like to see toward solidarity five to ten years in the future. Here, youth envisioned a future where there are more connections made between Indigenous communities and other marginalized groups, where more people are educated on and respect Indigenous rights, and where young people are leading this work.

> **Land acknowledgements can't just be a quick Google and reading off of a script.**
>
> It should be actually learning about the land you live on, what has happened there, and what are the principles to engage respectfully (taking only what you need).
>
> *-East Coast Online Sharing Circle Participant*

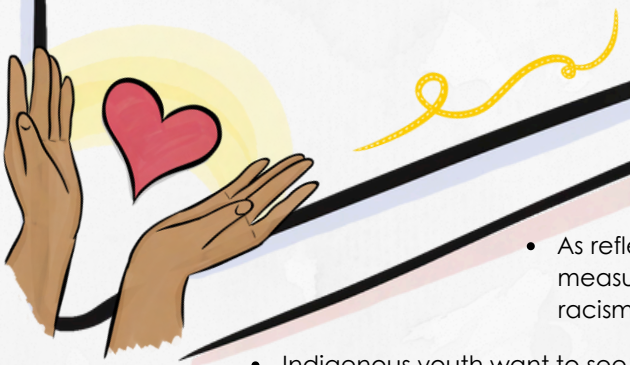
> **In the next 5 to 10 years, I hope to see more cross-community collaborations,**
> working together to address shared concerns. For example, organizing joint events, promoting resource-sharing initiatives, and collectively advocating for social justice and equality.
>
> *-Survey Participant*



TAKEAWAYS:
RECONCILIATION AND SOLIDARITY

STRENGTHSA

- Youth who belong to multiples communities impacted by systemic oppression and discrimination (such as youth who identify as Two-Spirit LGBTQQIA+, Afro-Indigenous youth, and youth with disabilities) affirmed the importance of solidarity the most
- Most youth agree that Indigenous governments, National Indigenous Organizations, and grassroots organizations are committed to reconciliation
- The vast majority of Indigenous youth think reconciliation and solidarity are important to them at some level
- Youth understand both reconciliation and solidarity to require tangible action, not performative or scripted gestures



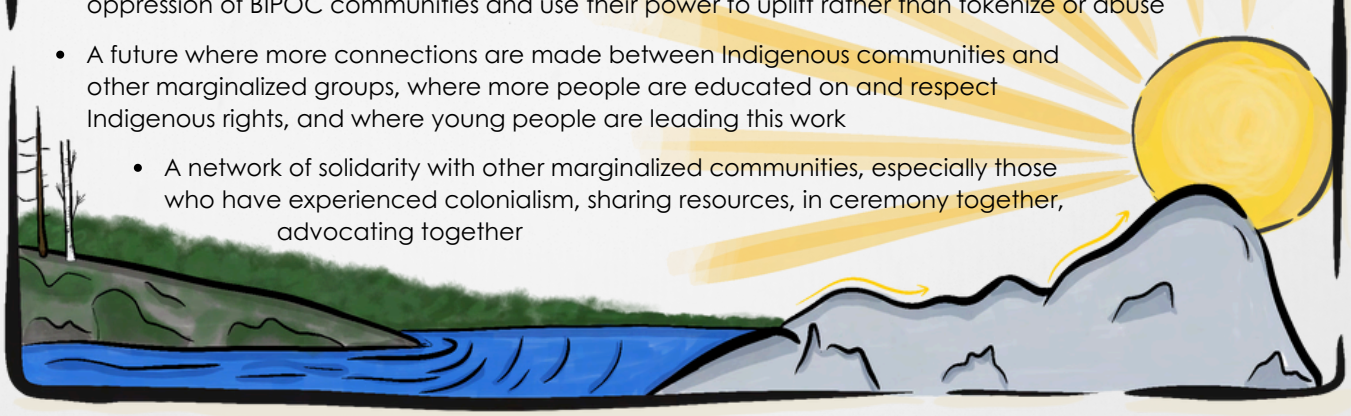


NEEDS & GAPSA

- Indigenous youth do not feel that provincial, territorial, or federal governments are committed to reconciliation
- As reflected in the rest of this report, Indigenous youth are calling for measurable, tangible actions to address inequality and systemic racism at every level (education system, health care, workplace)
- Indigenous youth want to see their own communities' leadership building more relationships and connections with other marginalized communities
- Many youth feel that industries and discourse have skipped over understanding and internalizing the *truth* part of *truth and reconciliation*. Relatedly, Indigenous youth are split relatively closely on whether the general public is committed to reconciliation

VISION FOR THE FUTUREA

- A future where Indigenous peoples are thriving and not just surviving, and where all marginalized people are made safe
- A future where non-Indigenous people understand their role in standing against discrimination and oppression of BIPOC communities and use their power to uplift rather than tokenize or abuse
- A future where more connections are made between Indigenous communities and other marginalized groups, where more people are educated on and respect Indigenous rights, and where young people are leading this work
- A network of solidarity with other marginalized communities, especially those who have experienced colonialism, sharing resources, in ceremony together, advocating together



Conclusion & Recommendations

The patience, energy, and trust of the Indigenous youth who participated in this project has yielded an immeasurable amount of wisdom. The stories they shared with us weave a complex tapestry of all the different ways they understand empowerment, connection, culture, community, education, meaningful work, reconciliation, and solidarity - and we have only scratched the surface of those understandings here in this report. IYR is committed to continuing to publish more content based on the information we've gathered for this project, and in ensuring that youth and their communities can use this information to advocate for the policy and law reform they need, and to develop and enhance essential programs and services.

> **I dream of a time when our community is sovereign. Where we do not have to function within colonial systems but have created our own systems.**
>
> We have built one another up and have created beautiful spaces and places that serve everyone. We have super systems in place so everyone has access to programs and services. We have the ability to envision and evolve and create.
>
> *-Survey Participant*

Highlights: Personal & Community Empowerment



Indigenous Youth empowerment is intimately tied to envisioning a good future for themselves and their communities, and to when they are able to access and connect to their cultures and languages. When asked about what makes them feel empowered, 81% said that they feel empowered when they can envision a good future for themselves and their communities. Money, lack of consistent and safe services, lack of services on-reserve and in rural or remote areas, and lack of wraparound supports like childcare were recurring themes when participants talked about the hurdles they are forced to jump as Indigenous young people. In particular, lack of access to safe and affordable housing and services were felt heavily by youth living in rural, remote and on-reserve areas, particularly in more northern areas and across Inuit Nunangat. Barriers related to money were more intensely felt by Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ youth, by youth living with a disability, and by Afro-Indigenous youth. Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ also youth brought up feeling unwelcomed or unsupported by their communities, saying that there is a lack of known safe spaces for them.

Youth were very clear about the supports they need to help them connect to culture and community: for those that don't or can't live at home, they need to be able to physically get to their communities and other cultural spaces. Once in those spaces, they need to be safe from homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination of all kind. In setting goals for themselves, youth talked about breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma, learning their language, and about improving the lives of their families and communities. Connection, relationships, and uplifting their communities are at the center of Indigenous youth's sense of self and sense of strength, always.

Highlights: Community and Culture

It follows then, that connection to both culture and community plays a critical role in the mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous youth, and many of the findings of this report reflect the paramount importance of those connections and relationships. In particular, Indigenous youth were unified in articulating the importance of connecting with and learning from Elders and the land. When asked about what makes them feel most connected to their culture, 67% of Indigenous youth said they feel this way when spending time in their community.

Indigenous youth we spoke to also revealed just how expansive and generous the concept of community can be, and that it is not limited to where you are from. In building their definitions, there was consensus that community should include mutual care and support and should involve gathering in person where possible. Cultural practices and traditions are an important anchor to Indigenous youths sense of community, and can include everything from being able to speak their languages, to going out on the land, to camping and participating in ceremonies, to beading and dancing. For urban Indigenous participants, Friendship Centres were frequently noted as important sites of cultural connection.



Highlights: Education and Meaningful Work

Youth were clear that meaningful work and good education must include space for culture and community, allowing them to balance their responsibilities to their communities and families. Their responses indicate a deep commitment to advocating for national and global change and improving their communities through working in healing and wellness, and by supporting youth, Indigenous women, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ youth. They understand meaningful work to go beyond exchanging labour for wages and include advocacy and land defense in their definitions of meaningful work. When asked what supports are needed for them to pursue meaningful work, 52% of Indigenous youth said they need social, emotional and cultural supports, and 52% also said they need a safe or supportive work environment. As long as college and university tuition remain expensive, youth interested in post-secondary education need more inclusive financial supports in the form of loans, grants, and scholarships. For 91% of Indigenous youth, financial assistance is one of the most important supports needed to pursue education.

Youth also stressed that all forms of education and knowledge should be recognized as valid, especially the lived experiences and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples. When asked what education means to them, 83% of Indigenous youth said that they define education as learning through lived experiences. Indigenous youth have called for schools to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into their curriculums and offer more opportunities for things like land-based learning. They also want to see educational and professional settings shift away from the current Western standards and norms. Generally, youth envision more innovative workplaces and educational spaces that allow their ambitions and visions of the future to thrive, rather than being obstacles to fulfilling their educational and professional goals.



Highlights: Reconciliation and Solidarity

Indigenous youth want to see more of their communities engaging in solidarity activities. When asked whether solidarity with other marginalized communities is important to them, the overwhelming majority (73%) said yes. Youth understand both reconciliation and solidarity to require tangible action, not performative or scripted gestures, and most Indigenous youth want to see their own communities' leadership building more relationships and connections with other marginalized communities.

The majority of youth agreed that Indigenous governments, National Indigenous organizations, and grassroots organizations are committed to reconciliation. However, most Indigenous youth do not think municipal, provincial, territorial, or federal governments are committed to reconciliation. Many youth feel that mainstream culture and discourse has skipped over understanding and internalizing the truth part of truth and reconciliation. Without a shared and truthful understanding of the past and ongoing impacts of colonialism, meaningful reconciliation will remain out of reach. Relatedly, Indigenous youth are split relatively closely on whether the general public is committed to reconciliation (35% agree, 37% are neutral, and 28% disagree). As reflected in the rest of this report, for Indigenous youth, reconciliation means tangible actions to address inequality and systemic racism at every level.

Youth who belong to multiples communities impacted by systemic oppression and discrimination (such as youth who identify as Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+, Afro-Indigenous youth, and youth with disabilities) affirmed the importance of solidarity the most. Youth are envisioning a future where more connections made between Indigenous communities and other marginalized groups, where more people are educated on and respect Indigenous rights, and where young people are leading this work.



Shifts from the 2019 Barometer

In the results we were able to compare to the 2019 Reconciliation Barometer, it became clear that Indigenous youth in 2024 are more concerned with finding and creating community connection and living a balanced life rather than on material, wealth-based achievements. In part, this might highlight the very different context of 2023/2024 compared to 2018/2019; the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing housing and affordability crises, and the escalating climate crises have been a wake-up call for many to reassess their priorities, and to become further engaged in activism and advocacy. These contexts have helped form a sense of urgency for Indigenous youth to advocate for a more sustainable future for themselves and for generations to come, often in opposition to capitalist interests and political will.

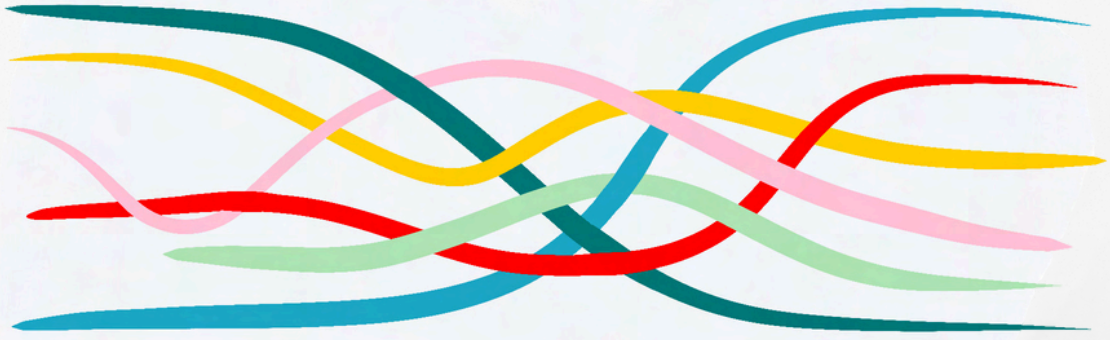
2019 - 2024 Barometer Comparison Stats

2019 Barometer - Top 3 lifetime goal themes:	**2024 Barometer Top 3 lifetime goals:**
1. Career or job-related goals - 45% 2. Family (children/marriage) - 41% 3. Owning property/possessions (house, car, land) - 32%	1. Living a balanced life - 74% 2. Strengthening connection to and knowledge of culture - 49% 3. Being happy and healthy - 48%
2019 Barometer Question - Is learning your ancestral language fluently important to living a good life? • Very Important - 33% • Somewhat Important - 35% • Not Important - 29%	**2024 Barometer Question - What best describes your language learning status?** • I have learned my language and am fluent - 15% • I am in the process of learning my language - 35% • I would like to learn but there's no way for me to - 16% • I would like to learn my language but haven't looked into how to do that - 28% • I am not interested in learning my language - 2% • Other - 4%



In looking at the barriers Indigenous youth are facing to achieving their goals, finances and mental health challenges were top factors in 2019 and have remained so in this year's Barometer project. In looking at what inspires and motivates them to achieve their goals, youth in the 2019 Barometer were much more likely to cite personal drive as their top motivator while Indigenous youth in this year's Barometer were more likely to select support from family and friends.

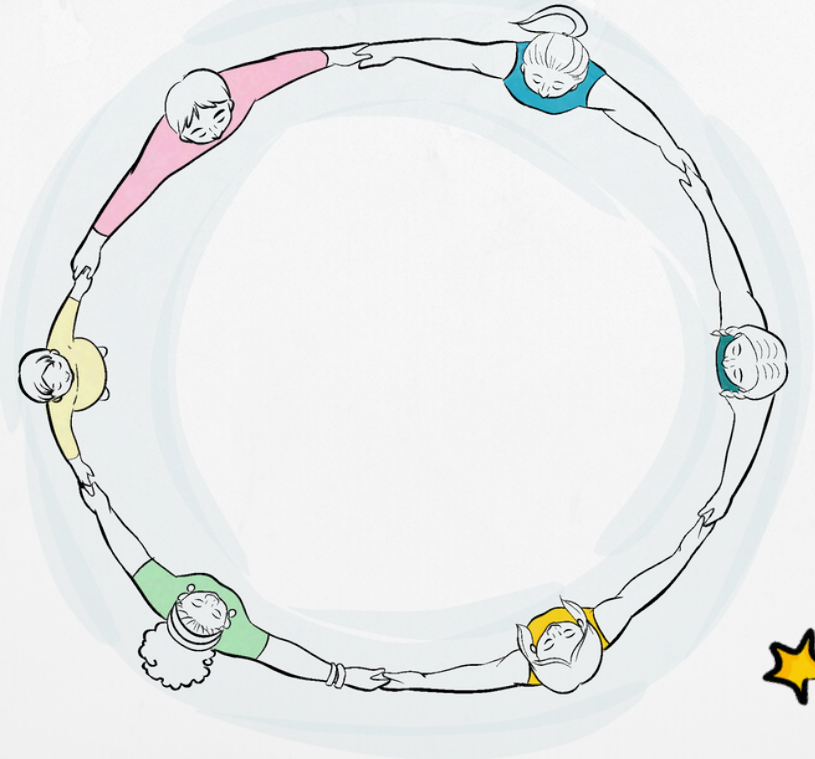
Recent years have seen the discoveries of unmarked Indian Residential School graves, increasing pressure on the Government of Canada to follow through on commitments to implement the TRC Calls to Action, the MMIWG Inquiry Calls to Justice, and an escalating climate crisis and housing crisis that disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities. In keeping with these realities, Indigenous youth in the 2019 Barometer were more optimistic than youth today about the progress and future of reconciliation, with three quarters of Indigenous youth respondents in 2019 saying they were somewhat if not very optimistic about the possibility of meaningful reconciliation in their lifetime. When asked how optimistic they were that the reconciliation actions they want to see will happen, 51% of youth in this year's project responded that they were optimistic, 20% were neutral and 21% were pessimistic.



Infinite Identities, Infinite Perspectives

Much as there is no single Indigenous perspective, Indigenous youth perspectives and experiences are as diverse and varied as can be. Throughout this report, we've attempted to foreground the multi-dimensionality of Indigenous youth identities, needs, and realities as they relate to our discussion themes. For example, examining youth empowerment reveals that youth living at certain identity intersections were more likely to find empowerment in being role models, including Afro-Indigenous youth, Transgender men, and Two-Spirit(+) youth. Two-Spirit and youth who identify as LGBTQQIA+ were also more likely to specify needing more cultural programming spaces specifically for them. Youth living with a disability were overall more likely to highlight an overall need for more mental and physical wellness supports designed for them.

We can also see important differences on an identity-basis when we review answers about traditional language acquisition. 50% of youth we spoke to have learned or are learning their language, with 44% saying they want to learn their language (16% asserting that there isn't a way for them to do it and 28% saying that they haven't looked into how to learn yet). However, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth are at different places in terms of their language fluency, and in their ability to access that knowledge, highlighting the need for distinctions-based language revitalization and transmission programs and funding. Youth need time, money, and safe, supportive programming to be able to learn their languages. A variety of options for free or low-cost language programming would be beneficial for all Indigenous youth wanting to learn.

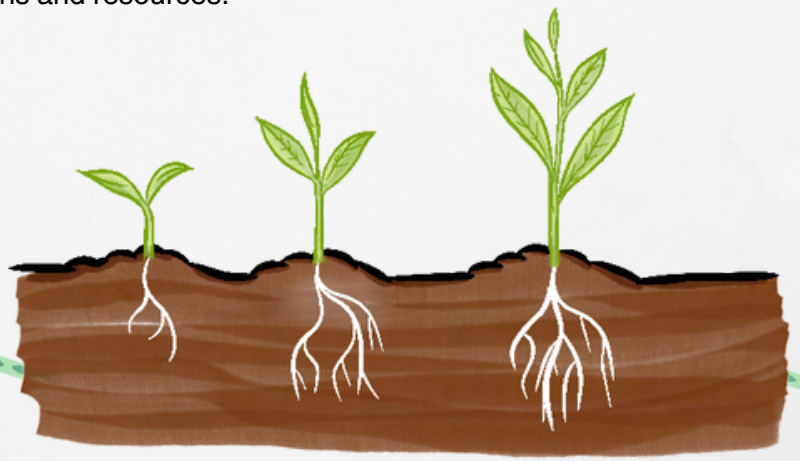


Indigenous Youth Building Abundant and Connected Futures

The future Indigenous youth are building is one where their communities are accountable and connected to each other, bound by respectful relationships and where BIPOC communities show up for each other in meaningful ways. Indigenous youth want to see healthy sovereign nations where everyone has access to what they need, beyond the bare necessities of clean water and safe housing. This means abundant and accessible Elder supports, addictions services, community centres, language learning programs, and Indigenous-led educational facilities and health care facilities. It also means communities that are rooted in their traditional teachings and systems of governance.

In addition to outlining what they want for their futures, youth also made clear what they are working to leave in the past. This includes all barriers that keep them, other youth, and future youth from connecting with their communities and culture, such as lateral violence, unaccountability, homophobia and transphobia, and anti-Black racism. Indigenous youth are committed to building futures where no one is forced to leave their communities to access services like health care and counselling, or to find work, or to attend school, unless it's purely out of choice.

Wherever possible, we've sought to build policy and program recommendations out of the stories and wisdom shared by the Indigenous youth we spoke to. The recommendations below are meant to be a window into the future Indigenous youth are already building and we invite all sectors to review them for how they can be integrated into your commitment to reconciliation and to Indigenous youth empowerment and agency. Again, these recommendations are a starting place and IYR will continue to unpack the immense amount of information we've gathered to produce sector-specific recommendations and resources.



Recommendations Related to Theme 1: Personal and Community Empowerment

To support their personal empowerment and the empowerment of their communities, Indigenous youth are calling for:

1. Resources to build up every aspect of community living, including:
    a. Access to all essential services in their communities, including health care, dental care, vision care, and mental health services
    b. Access to safe, Indigenous-led educational facilities
    c. Access to safe and affordable housing
    d. Equal access to quality infrastructure (roads, electricity, transportation, internet)
    e. Safe, quality support centres for Elders
    f. Sport and recreational centres for Indigenous peoples of all ages
    g. Programming and healing centres dedicated to healing from addictions and lateral violence
    h. Increase of accessible spaces for community members with disabilities
    i. Programming, resources, and policy reform that support food security for Indigenous communities (e.g., having community gardens, better food pricing, hunting, and harvesting)
    j. More Friendship Centres in urban areas
2. More health, wellness, and associated financial supports for Indigenous youth living with disabilities
3. More safe and affordable housing, particularly in rural, remote, onreserve areas and Inuit Nunangat
4. Closing the infrastructure gaps between remote, rural, Northern, and on-reserve Indigenous communities and urban communities, including ensuring all Indigenous youth have access to:
    a. Reliable internet connections
    b. Safe drinking water, and more education at the community level to support that safety
5. More Indigenous youth specific information, programming, and support services related to investing, applying for business grants, and overall financial literacy



Recommendations Related to Theme 2: Culture, Language, and Wellness

With culture and language acquisition as important anchors to their sense of wellness, Indigenous youth are calling for:

1. More cultural spaces and programs for youth wherever they live. In particular, the following youth were less likely to have access to cultural spaces and programs:
    a. Inuit youth
    b. Métis youth
    c. Transgender youth
    d. Afro-Indigenous youth
    e. Youth living in the Atlantic provinces
    f. Youth living in the Northwest Territories
    g. Youth living in Rural or Remote communities

2. More safe, accessible, affordable language programming for all Indigenous youth, with a focus on youth living on the east coast, youth living with a disability, and gender-diverse, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQQIA+ youth. This programming should also be adaptable and supportive of different learning styles and needs

3. Supports for communities to build their capacity to do language transmission programming, including keeping fluent language speakers in the community

4. More language learning programs, opportunities, and formats especially ones that don't force Indigenous people into post-secondary spaces to access programming

5. More community-led and community-based programming and healing that addresses the following issues within Indigenous communities:
    a. Lateral violence
    b. Colourism
    c. Anti-Black racism
    d. Homophobia
    e. Transphobia



Recommendations Related to Theme 3: Education and Meaningful Work

To pursue the work and education they find meaningful, Indigenous youth need more supports of all varieties, and they are specifically calling for:

1. Universal basic income that would allow them more flexibility to pursue their own ideas of meaningful work, go to school if they choose, and enable them to stay and work in their communities
2. Workplaces that are safe and supportive in every regard, especially as it relates to supporting their Indigenous employees, such as through allowing culture/ceremony days off, ensuring that anti-Indigenous racism is not tolerated
3. Innovative and flexible workplaces that enable youth to pursue their goals related to supporting and connecting to their communities
4. More accessible Indigenous career mentors
5. More Indigenous-led career opportunities
6. Access to culturally safe spaces and overall cultural safety within education institutions
7. Curriculum and admittance reforms to place value on Indigenous ways of knowing and being and on lived experiences over strictly Western academia-related credentials
8. Access to navigators to help Indigenous youth navigate complex systems related to applying to school and funding (scholarships, grants, bursaries)
9. Recognizing that many youth are forced to leave their communities for secondary or post-secondary education - more opportunities for online or local education, particularly for youth living in certain areas (rural, remote, on-reserve, Yukon, British Columbia)
10. Subsidized housing for Indigenous students
11. Financial assistance for post-secondary education is often not sufficient, has stringent requirements, and/or inaccessible application processes. More funding is needed for all Indigenous youth, regardless of whether they have status
12. Acceptance of lived experiences and other learning avenues outside of post-secondary education as equally valuable to diplomas and degrees
13. More Indigenous youth job training programs, especially for:
    a. Youth living in remote communities
    b. Youth living in rural communities
    c. Youth living in On-Reserve communities

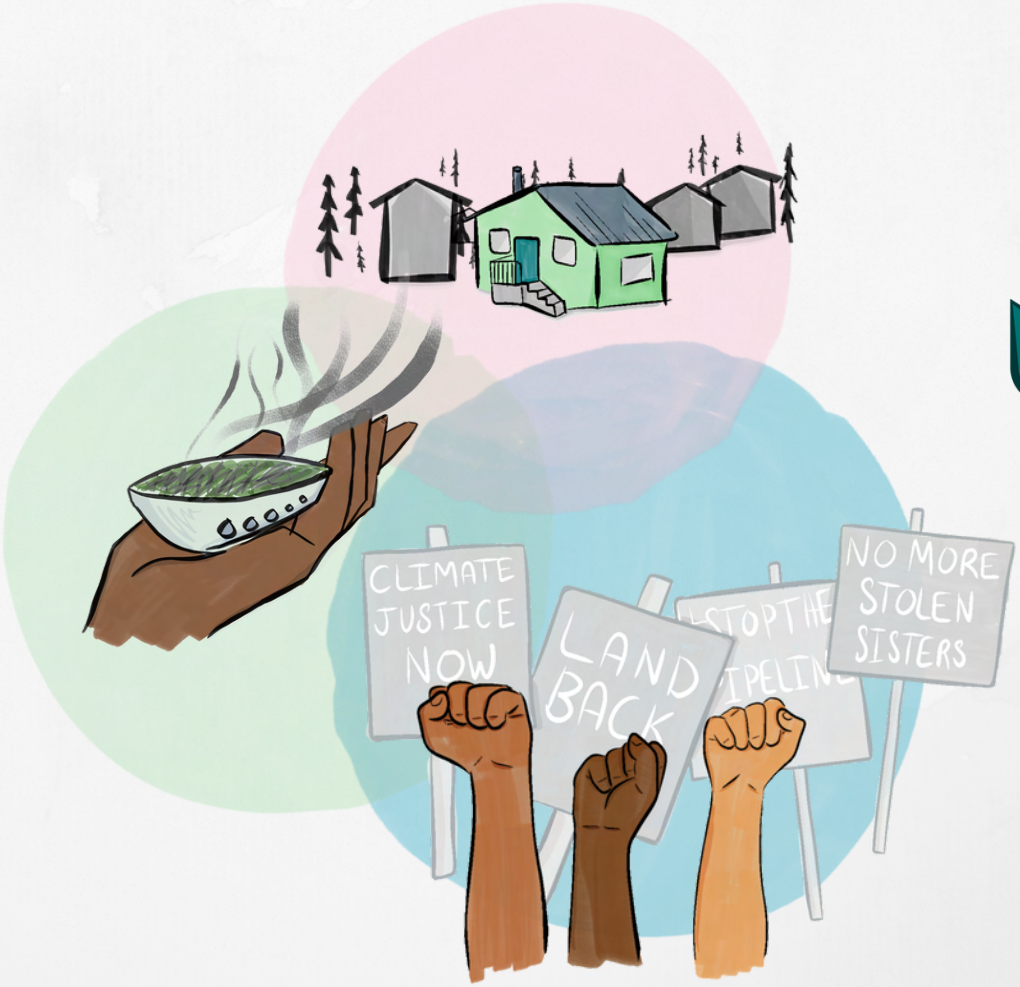
Recommendations Related to Theme 4: Reconciliation and Solidarity

In pursuit of true reconciliation and community solidarity, Indigenous youth are calling for:

1. Recognizing that many Indigenous youth do not believe federal, provincial, and territorial governments have made a lot of progress toward reconciliation, more trust building is needed and more consistent, meaningful work on completing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, the MMIWG Inquiry's Calls for Justice, and furthering the implementation of UNDRIP is needed

2. Ensuring that all Indigenous people have access to clean water, safe housing, and affordable food. Basic needs must be met before any true progress toward reconciliation can be trusted Reconciliation and public education efforts to be refocused on the truth component of truth and reconciliation

3. Reconciliation and public education efforts to be refocused on the truth component of truth and reconciliation



INDIGENOUS YOUTH ROOTS

INDIGENOUS YOUTH RECONCILIATION BAROMETER 2024:

Building Connected Futures