ABORIGINAL MYTHS & FACTS

There are more than a million people who identify as Aboriginal in Canada. They are important contributors to our history, culture and values, and the national economic picture. And yet there remain many myths surrounding Canada’s Aboriginal population. Myths are misperceptions, which can lead to distorted thinking and a lack of understanding about Aboriginal communities, underlying Aboriginal socio-economic conditions, as well as the effectiveness of government programs and policy targeted to the Aboriginal community. While the information provided here debunks just ten – many more exist.

**MYTH 1:** Aboriginal people do not pay taxes.

**FACT 1:** Some do, some don’t. All Inuit, Metis, Non-Status Indians, and Status Indians who live off-reserve pay taxes. The only people who are exempt from paying taxes are Status Indians who earn their income on a reserve for a company or organization located on the reserve.

**MYTH 2:** Aboriginal people get all kinds of money from the government.

**FACT 2:** Treaty People get a $5.00 Treaty once per year, in cash. This is the same amount they received under the Treaties over 100 years ago. There has been no adjustment for inflation.

**MYTH 3:** Aboriginal people do not have to pay for postsecondary education.

**FACT 3:** Some don’t, some do. Access to education is not free, it is a treaty right. Programs have been set up to defray tuition costs, travel costs and living expenses associated with post secondary education, though at present, there are no post-secondary support programs for students who identify as Non-Status Indian and Métis. Also, with more demand than funds, there has been increased limitations placed on applications and eligibility.

**MYTH 4:** Almost all Aboriginal people live on reserve and in rural areas.

**FACT 4:** False. Aboriginal peoples currently reside in every province and territory, with British Columbia, the Prairies, and Central Canada being home to the highest number of Aboriginal people. One in five Aboriginal Canadians lived on reserve in 2011. The majority of all Aboriginals (54% in 2011) live off-reserve in an urban setting. Both of these shares have been relatively constant over the past decade, cementing the fact that most Aboriginals are urban and off-reserve dwellers and have been for some time.

**MYTH 5:** Aboriginal people are falling further behind in the job market.

**FACT 5:** False. In 2008, 36% of all employed Aboriginal people worked in the goods producing sector and construction. The unemployment rate dropped from 17.4% in 2001 to 9.3% in 2008. Both the labour market participation rate and unemployment rate are better today than in 2001, which means that over the past decade Aboriginal people are increasingly participating in the market economy.