



NEWS RELEASE

Expanding eligibility for aboriginal status key reason for population boom; increases government costs

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For immediate release

VANCOUVER—Canada’s indigenous population increased by a staggering 275 per cent between 1986 and 2011—eight times faster than the general population—as more and more Canadians identify as indigenous, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

According to Statistics Canada, the country’s total indigenous population—including Status Indian, Non-Status Indian, Métis, Inuit, and other—increased from 373,265 to 1,400,685 during the 25-year period.

“This is not only an issue of how people choose to label themselves, but also about people being incentivised by government benefits to identify as indigenous, which increases financial pressures on government,” said Tom Flanagan, Fraser Institute senior fellow, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Calgary and author of [*Incentives, Identity, and the Growth of Canada’s Indigenous Population*](#).

The study finds that recent court decisions and legislative amendments have extended Registered Indian Status—and the benefits that go along with it—to thousands of Canadians who previously weren’t eligible.

In fact, one estimate quoted in the study suggests the number of registered Indians alone—excluding the much larger increases experienced in the Metis and Non-Status Indian populations—is at least 40 per cent higher because of legal and legislative changes that have broadened the rules of who was legally indigenous since 1985.

And being granted registered Indian status in Canada offers certain economic benefits, which in some cases apply to Canadians who may not even belong to any particular First Nation. For example:

- **Health:** All registered Indians and Inuit are eligible for coverage by a supplemental health benefits plan, including dental, vision care, drug costs and pharmacy products.
- **Taxes:** Income earned on reserves is often exempt from taxes, and in some cases, non-resident but registered Indians can have sales and excise taxes exempt for purchases made on a reserve.
- **Education:** The federal government delivers about \$340 million annually to some 22,000 indigenous students for university and college.
- **Hunting and fishing:** Although rules vary by province, resident First Nations members are often able to hunt and fish in areas and during seasons that are closed to others without purchasing a licence or abiding by normal limits.

“Many Canadians who have some degree of indigenous ancestry may be encouraged by these incentives and benefits to seek registration,” Flanagan said.

“If the legal and legislative trend of extending status to more and more Canadians continues, governments across Canada will face mounting financial pressure as the number of beneficiaries grows.”

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