

National Indigenous Youth Council on Sexual Health and HIV & AIDS

“Being an Indigenous Youth is *not* a Risk Factor”

Indigenous youth reject the idea that they are inherently ‘at risk’ because they are indigenous. Participants in a 2015 workshop defined colonialism, and vulnerabilities associated with the social determinants of health as the source of their risk for exposure to HIV/AIDS. Preferring a strengths-based approach to HIV/AIDS prevention, participating youth invite adults to contemplate the following truths:

- Beyond simplistic stereotypes lie the strengths and complex knowledge of Indigenous youth.
- Singular narratives about native youth are harmful, but recognizing that youth are situated in networks of relationships which can provide strength, skills, knowledge and sustenance is empowering.
- Youth have expert knowledge of their own lives and their voices deserve to be heard.
- They have said that negativity is “...heavy on our souls...”

We are Strong: Indigenous Youth Refute Inherent Risk

Youth have said they don’t access services because they don’t like how they are treated by professionals. They feel stigmatized by professionals when they hear judgemental comments on their need to access a service, on their sexuality, their choices, their substance use, their age or their race.

Are you listening?



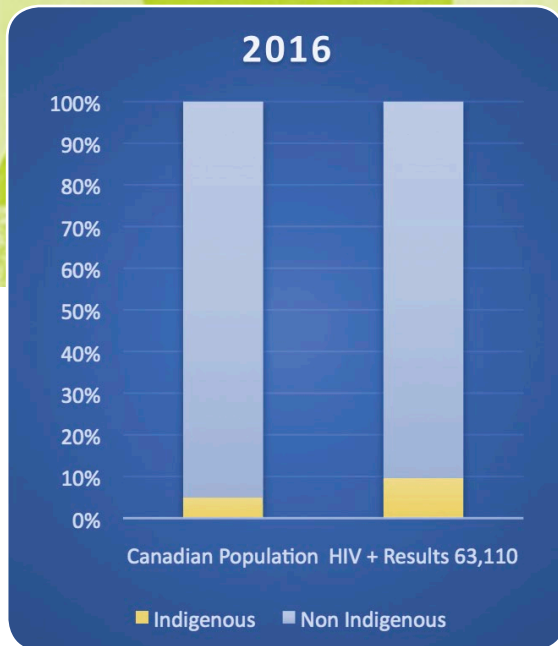
info sheet

*“Using hurtful
language is
heavy on our souls,
especially when it’s
[spoken] in [one’s
own] community.”*

Injection drug use is the main route of HIV transmission among indigenous people.

The estimated proportion of new HIV infections in 2011 attributed to injection drug use exposure was much higher among Indigenous people (58.1%) than among all other Canadians (13.7%).





Indigenous Females

HIV has a significant impact on Indigenous females. Between 1998 and 2012, nearly half (47.3%) of all positive HIV test reports among Indigenous people (3124) were females, compared with 20.1% of reports for people of other ethnicities. Age at the time of HIV diagnosis for Indigenous people tends to be younger than for people of other ethnicities. Almost one-third (31.6%) of the positive HIV test reports from 1998 to 2012 among Indigenous people were youth aged 15 to 29 years old, compared with 22.2% among those of other ethnicities.

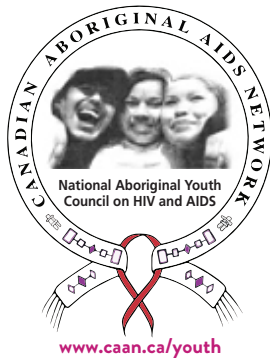
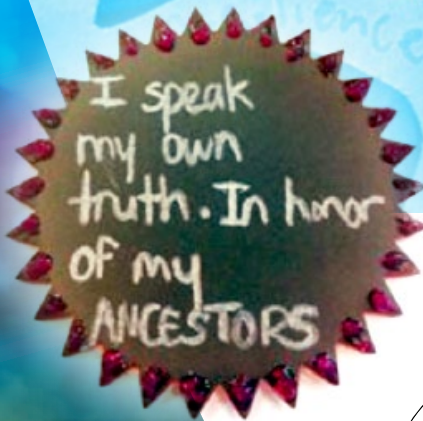
HIV among Indigenous people is closely linked to a variety of social determinants of health that influence vulnerability to HIV/AIDS including poverty, unstable housing and homelessness, mental health and addictions, traumatic childhood experiences, racism and the multi-generational effects of colonialism and residential schooling. Youth want this to be accepted and understood by service providers so that they can offer to youths compassionate, strengths-based support for testing, treatment and related services.

INFO SHEET – National Indigenous Youth Council on Sexual Health and HIV & AIDS

Wise Prevention Practices:

Youth will seek out testing and other services when such places are safe, stigma-free spaces. HIV/AIDS prevention programs for youth need to model:

- Respect: by using harm reduction & trauma informed approaches to treating the whole person.
- Inclusivity: welcome 2SLGBTQIAS+ folks by supporting all sexual identities, orientations and relationships.
- Acceptance: of lifestyle and substance use: meet youth where they are at.
- Cultural and Community Support: access to traditional practices, support of Elders, and ceremony has a preventive effect.
- Localized: Provide access to cultural activities, language lessons, elders, and traditions. Help youth to know their culture and to draw strength from their community.
- Holistic: use approaches that address the whole person without stigma.
- Strengths-based: Use a positive perspective and positive language that affirms positive qualities modeled by youth. Their strength, intelligence, resilience, caring, hope and inclusive attitudes... their successes, their respectful behaviour.
- Arts-based: Using arts-based research and programs to talk about difficult subjects is a recognized good practice for engaging youth in a meaningful way.



For more information including
Community Action-Based toolkits: [caan.ca](http://www.caan.ca)

Service Provider: find more information here:

<https://www.nccih.ca/docs/emerging/WEBINAR-TwoSpiritHealth-BeyondAtRisk.pdf>

<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/indigenizingharmreduction.html>

<http://www.takingaction4youth.org/>

<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/sexyhealthcarnival.html>

Reach us on Facebook:

National Indigenous Youth Council
on Sexual Health and HIV & AIDS

or by email: iehentef@caan.ca