

**NHS in Brief**

# Aboriginal peoples and language



**National Household Survey (NHS), 2011**



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## Standard symbols

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The following symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0<sup>s</sup> value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- P preliminary
- r revised
- x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- \* significantly different from reference category (p < 0.05)

### Box 1: National Household Survey

This is the first release of data from the National Household Survey (NHS). Roughly 4.5 million households across Canada were selected for the NHS, representing about one-third of all households.

This *NHS in Brief* article complements the analytical document [Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit](#), Catalogue no. 99-011-X2011001.

Further information on the National Household Survey can be found in the [National Household Survey User Guide](#), Catalogue no. 99-001-X. Specific information on the quality and comparability of NHS data on Aboriginal peoples can be found in the [Aboriginal Peoples Reference Guide, National Household Survey](#), Catalogue no. 99-011-X2011006.

### About one in six Aboriginal people can converse in an Aboriginal language

According to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), 240,815 Aboriginal people, or 17.2% of the population who had an Aboriginal identity, responded that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> ([Table 1](#)). This compares with 21.0%<sup>5</sup> according to the 2006 Census of Population. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of Aboriginal people who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language declined by 2.0%, while the Aboriginal identity population increased by 20.1%.

Among the three Aboriginal groups<sup>6</sup> (First Nations people,<sup>7</sup> Métis and Inuit), the proportion reporting an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language was the highest among Inuit. In 2011, 63.7% of Inuit reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, mostly Inuktitut. The proportion was 22.4% among First Nations people and 2.5% among Métis.

In addition to the ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, the NHS collected information on mother tongue and home language providing additional insight into the linguistic characteristics of the Aboriginal population.

1. The document entitled [Aboriginal languages in Canada](#), Catalogue no. 98-314-X2011003, in the Census in Brief series, presents information on Aboriginal mother tongues and home languages for the total population (excluding institutional residents) based on the data from the 2011 Census of Population. Mother tongue and home language data are also available in the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) but they are presented for a different universe (population in private households) and are therefore not directly comparable to the 2011 Census data. Information about knowledge of Aboriginal languages and language data for the Aboriginal population are available only from the NHS and are the main focus of this document.
2. Some Indian reserves and settlements did not participate in the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) as enumeration was either not permitted, it was interrupted before completion, or because of natural events (e.g., forest fires). These reserves are referred to as 'incompletely enumerated reserves.' There were 36 reserves out of 863 inhabited reserves in the 2011 NHS that were incompletely enumerated. Data for these 36 Indian reserves and Indian settlements are not included in the 2011 NHS tabulations. As a result, some estimates in this document may be underestimated, especially for First Nations people. Please refer to the reference document entitled [Aboriginal Peoples Reference Guide, National Household Survey](#), Catalogue no. 99-011-X2011006, for more information on these exclusions.
3. Estimates for knowledge of Aboriginal language in this document include single responses of an Aboriginal language as well as multiple responses of an Aboriginal language with English, French, different Aboriginal languages and/or non-official and non-Aboriginal languages. Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for concepts and definitions.
4. Almost all (98.4%) of the 240,815 Aboriginal people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in only one Aboriginal language. The other 1.6% reported being able to converse in two or three different Aboriginal languages.
5. Data in this document showing changes in percentages and proportions between the 2011 National Household Survey and the 2006 Census data have been adjusted to account for incompletely enumerated Indian reserves in 2006 and/or 2011. Moreover, the 2006 Census data have been adjusted to the same universe used for the 2011 NHS (population in private households).
6. Although single and multiple responses to the Aboriginal identity question are possible, the data for each of the three Aboriginal groups in this document are based on the population reporting a single identity of 'First Nations', 'Métis' or 'Inuit.'
7. Respondents self-identified as 'First Nations (North American Indian)' on the NHS questionnaire; however, the term 'First Nations people' is used throughout this document.

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In 2011, 14.5% of the Aboriginal population reported an Aboriginal language as mother tongue,<sup>8</sup> defined as the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the survey.

As well, 14.0% of Aboriginal people reported speaking an Aboriginal language at home: 8.5% spoke it most often while another 5.5% spoke it on a regular basis, in addition to the language they spoke most often.

**Table 1 Proportion of Aboriginal identity population, First Nations people, Métis and Inuit for selected Aboriginal language indicators, Canada, 2011**

Selected Aboriginal language indicators	Total Aboriginal identity population	First Nations single identity	Métis single identity	Inuit single identity
	Proportion (%) of population			
Ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language	17.2	22.4	2.5	63.7
Aboriginal language as mother tongue	14.5	18.7	1.8	58.7
Aboriginal language spoken at least regularly at home	14.0	18.0	1.6	59.5
Aboriginal language spoken most often at home	8.5	10.3	0.7	45.9
Aboriginal language spoken regularly at home <sup>1</sup>	5.5	7.7	0.9	13.6

1. This category excludes individuals who reported speaking one Aboriginal language most often at home and speaking another Aboriginal language regularly at home. These individuals are included only in the category 'Aboriginal language spoken most often at home.'

**Note:** Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for concepts and definitions.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

### Most Aboriginal people can converse in English or French

The vast majority (99.2%) of Aboriginal people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in English or French while 10,650, or less than 1%, reported that they were not able to conduct a conversation in either official language ([Table 2](#)). Among the three Aboriginal groups, a greater proportion of Inuit (8.5%) reported having knowledge of neither English nor French.

**Table 2 Percentage distribution of the population by knowledge of official languages for selected Aboriginal identity categories, Canada, 2011**

Knowledge of official languages	Total Aboriginal identity population	First Nations single identity	Métis single identity	Inuit single identity	Non-Aboriginal identity population
	Percentage (%) distribution of the population				
Total population	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English only	84.0	88.0	77.3	83.4	67.5
French only	4.7	4.4	5.3	2.0	12.9
English and French	10.5	7.0	17.3	6.2	17.9
Neither English nor French	0.8	0.6	0.1	8.5	1.7

**Note:** Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for concepts and definitions.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

8. Estimates for mother tongue and home language in this document include single response of an Aboriginal language as well as multiple responses of an Aboriginal language with English and/or French. Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for concepts and definitions.

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The English-French bilingualism rate was lower for the Aboriginal population than for the non-Aboriginal population: 10.5% of Aboriginal people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in both of Canada's official languages, compared with 17.9% of the non-Aboriginal population.

Among the three Aboriginal groups, the Métis had the highest English-French bilingualism rate, 17.3%, almost identical to that of the non-Aboriginal population.

Among the 147,045 Aboriginal people who were able to conduct a conversation in both English and French, 49.8% reported French as their only mother tongue and 41.4% reported English as their only mother tongue, while another 5.9% had an Aboriginal language only as mother tongue.

### **Some Aboriginal people acquiring an Aboriginal language as a second language**

More Aboriginal people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language than reported an Aboriginal mother tongue. In 2011, 240,815 Aboriginal people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, while 202,495 Aboriginal people reported an Aboriginal mother tongue ([Table 3](#)). This implies that a number of Aboriginal people have acquired an Aboriginal language as a second language.

Among the 240,815 Aboriginal people who reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, 188,540 or 78.3% reported that same language as their mother tongue.

The other 52,275, or 21.7%, reported a different language, such as English or French, as mother tongue, which suggests these individuals have acquired an Aboriginal language as a second language. The proportion varied from 35.3% for the Métis, 23.1% for First Nations people to 10.2% for Inuit.

According to the 2011 NHS, 4,305 non-Aboriginal people reported knowing an Aboriginal language. Most of them (80.5%) did not report it as their mother tongue and thus have acquired it as a second language.

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**Table 3 Population who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue, population who reported an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language and population who reported an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language that is not their mother tongue, for selected Aboriginal identity categories, Canada, 2011**

Selected Aboriginal identity categories	Persons reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue <sup>1</sup>	Persons reporting an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language		
		Total <sup>1</sup>	Persons who could conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language that is not their mother tongue	
			number <sup>1,2</sup>	%
Total Aboriginal identity population	202,495	240,815	52,275	21.7
First Nations single identity	158,880	191,010	44,140	23.1
Métis single identity	8,270	11,255	3,975	35.3
Inuit single identity	34,900	37,880	3,845	10.2
Non-Aboriginal identity population	1,255	4,305	3,465	80.5

1. The estimates for the three Aboriginal groups do not add to the total Aboriginal identity population because only selected Aboriginal identity categories are shown.

2. This number cannot be obtained by subtracting the number of people who reported an Aboriginal language as a mother tongue from the number of people who can converse in an Aboriginal language as there are people who reported an Aboriginal language as mother tongue but they could no longer conduct a conversation in this language, despite the fact that they still understand it.

**Note:** Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for concepts and definitions.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

### Less than one in ten of the Aboriginal people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue have lost their ability to converse in that language

Among the 202,495 Aboriginal people who reported an Aboriginal language as mother tongue, 13,955 or 6.9% could no longer conduct a conversation in this language, despite the fact that they still understand it<sup>9</sup> ([Table 4](#)).

The proportion varied from 12.0% for the Métis, 7.6% for First Nations people to 2.5% for Inuit. Moreover, non-Aboriginal people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue were more likely to lose their ability to conduct a conversation in their mother tongue, with 33.1% who could not conduct a conversation in this language any longer.

9. The NHS does not measure the number of persons who no longer understand the language they first learned at home in childhood.

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**Table 4 Population who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue and population who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue but who could not conduct a conversation in that language, for selected Aboriginal identity categories, Canada, 2011**

Selected Aboriginal identity categories	Persons reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue		
	Total <sup>1</sup>	Persons who could not conduct a conversation in their Aboriginal mother tongue	
		number <sup>1</sup>	%
Total Aboriginal identity population	202,495	13,955	6.9
First Nations single identity	158,880	12,010	7.6
Métis single identity	8,270	995	12.0
Inuit single identity	34,900	875	2.5
Non-Aboriginal identity population	1,255	415	33.1

1. The estimates for the three Aboriginal groups do not add to the total Aboriginal identity population because only selected Aboriginal identity categories are shown.

**Note:** Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for concepts and definitions.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

### About one in five First Nations people can converse in an Aboriginal language

In 2011, 191,010 First Nations people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, representing 22.4% of the First Nations population. This proportion was lower by 5.6 percentage points<sup>10</sup> than what was reported on the 2006 Census of Population. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of First Nations people who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language declined by 1.8%, while the total number of First Nations people increased by 22.9%.

First Nations people reported more than 60 Aboriginal languages in which they were able to conduct a conversation. The Aboriginal languages most frequently reported by First Nations people were the Cree languages.<sup>11</sup> About 87,600 First Nations people reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in one of these Cree languages, followed by 23,880 who reported Ojibway, 11,135 who reported Innu/Montagnais, 10,725 who reported Dene and 10,120 who reported they could converse in Oji-Cree. These five Aboriginal languages accounted for 75.1% of the First Nations people who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language.

First Nations people who reported having registered Indian status<sup>12</sup> were more likely to be able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language than those who were not Registered Indians. In 2011, 29.2% of the 637,660 First Nations people with registered Indian status were able to do so, compared with 2.2% of the 213,900 First Nations people who were not Registered Indians ([Table 5](#)).

10. After adjusting the data for both the 2011 NHS and the 2006 Census of Population to account for incompletely enumerated Indian reserves in 2006 and/or 2011, as well as adjusting the 2006 Census data to the same universe used for the 2011 NHS (population in private households), the proportion of First Nations people who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language was 22.5% according to the 2011 NHS and 28.1% according to the 2006 Census of Population.

11. Cree languages include the following categories: Cree not otherwise specified (which refers to those who reported 'Cree'), Swampy Cree, Plains Cree, Woods Cree, and a category labelled 'Cree not included elsewhere' (which includes Moose Cree, Northern East Cree and Southern East Cree).

12. For the purpose of this document, the term 'Registered Indian' will be used for people who reported being a Status, Registered or Treaty Indian on the NHS.

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In addition, 44.7% of First Nations people with registered Indian status living on reserve reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, more than three times the proportion of 14.1% among First Nations people with registered Indian status living off reserve.

**Table 5 Total population and population who reported an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language for selected First Nations population groups, Canada, 2011**

Selected First Nations population groups	First Nations population		
	Total	Persons reporting an ability to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language	
		number	%
Total First Nations people	851,560	191,010	22.4
Registered or Treaty Indian	637,660	186,210	29.2
Living on reserve	314,375	140,660	44.7
Living off reserve	323,290	45,545	14.1
Not a Registered or Treaty Indian	213,900	4,795	2.2

**Note:** Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for concepts and definitions.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

### Less than 3% of Métis can conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language

In 2011, 11,255 Métis, or 2.5% of the Métis population, reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language, compared with 3.5% according to the 2006 Census of Population. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of Métis who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Aboriginal language declined by 17.9%, while the Métis population increased by 16.3%.

The NHS recorded more than 20 Aboriginal languages in which Métis reported that they were able to conduct a conversation. The Aboriginal languages spoken by the largest number of Métis were the Cree languages, reported by 7,110 persons. They were followed by 2,080 who reported Dene, 940 who reported Michif and 805 who reported being able to converse in Ojibway. These four Aboriginal languages accounted for 97.2% of the Métis population that reported speaking an Aboriginal language well enough to carry out a conversation.

### Nearly two in three Inuit can conduct a conversation in an Inuit language

In 2011, 37,615 Inuit, or 63.3% of the Inuit population, reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language ([Table 6](#)). In the 2006 Census of Population, that proportion was 68.8%. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of Inuit who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language increased by 8.6%, a slower pace compared with the growth of 18.1% for the Inuit population.

The Inuit language spoken by the largest number of Inuit was Inuktitut. About 36,050 Inuit reported being able to conduct a conversation in Inuktitut. They were followed by 675 who reported being able to speak Inuinnaqtun, 625 who reported Inuvialuktun and 285 who reported being able to converse in another Inuit language.

Inuktitut accounted for 95.8% of the Inuit population who reported that they were able to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language. Relatively low numbers (less than 400) of Inuit spoke other Aboriginal languages, such as Cree (150) and Innu/Montagnais (95).

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The proportion of Inuit who reported being able to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language differed within Inuit Nunangat.<sup>13</sup> Virtually all Inuit (99.1%) living in Nunavik could converse in an Inuit language. In Nunavut, nearly nine in ten Inuit could speak an Inuit language well enough to hold a conversation in that language.

Fewer Inuit living in Nunatsiavut (24.9%) and in the Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories (20.1%) reported knowing an Inuit language. Outside Inuit Nunangat,<sup>14</sup> one in ten Inuit reported speaking an Inuit language well enough to conduct a conversation.

**Table 6 Total Inuit population and Inuit population who reported an ability to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language by area of residence – Inuit Nunangat, Canada, 2011**

Area of residence – Inuit Nunangat	Inuit population		
	Total	Inuit reporting an ability to conduct a conversation in an Inuit language	
		number	%
Total Inuit population	59,445	37,615	63.3
Inuit Nunangat	43,460	35,995	82.8
Nunatsiavut	2,325	580	24.9
Nunavik	10,755	10,660	99.1
Nunavut	27,070	24,090	89.0
Inuvialuit region	3,305	665	20.1
Outside Inuit Nunangat <sup>1</sup>	15,980	1,625	10.2

1. Data for Inuit outside of Inuit Nunangat, as it represents less than 1% of the Canadian population, should be used with caution because of lower reliability.

**Note:** Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for concepts and definitions.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

13. Please refer to [Box 2: Concepts and definitions](#) at the end of the document for the definition of Inuit Nunangat.

14. Data for Inuit outside of Inuit Nunangat, as it represents less than 1% of the Canadian population, should be used with caution because of lower reliability.

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### Box 2: Concepts and definitions

**Ability to conduct a conversation:** See the definition for 'Knowledge of languages.'

**Aboriginal identity:** The term 'Aboriginal identity' refers to whether the person reported being an Aboriginal person, that is, First Nations (North American Indian), Métis or Inuk (Inuit) and/or being a Registered or Treaty Indian, (that is, registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada) and/or being a member of a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada are defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

**Home language:** Refers to the language spoken most often or on a regular basis (in addition to the language spoken most often) at home by the individual at the time of the survey.

**Inuit Nunangat:** Inuit Nunangat is the homeland of Inuit of Canada. It includes the communities located in the four Inuit regions: Nunatsiavut (Northern coastal Labrador), Nunavik (Northern Quebec), the territory of Nunavut and the Inuvialuit region of the Northwest Territories. These regions collectively encompass the area traditionally occupied by Inuit in Canada.

**Knowledge of languages:** Refers to languages in which the respondent can conduct a conversation. The knowledge of languages data are based on the respondent's assessment of his or her ability to speak these languages.

**Mother tongue:** Refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the survey.

**On reserve:** 'On reserve' includes six types of census subdivisions (CSDs) legally affiliated with First Nations or Indian bands, i.e., Indian reserve (IRI), Indian settlement (S-É) (except for the five Yukon settlements of Champagne Landing 10, Klukshu, Two and One-Half Mile Village, Two Mile Village and Kloo Lake), Indian government district (IGD), *terres réservées aux Cris* (TC), *terres réservées aux Naskapis* (TK) and Nisga'a land (NL), as well as the northern village of Sandy Bay in Saskatchewan.

**Registered or Treaty Indian (Status Indians):** Registered Indians are persons who are registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada. Treaty Indians are persons who belong to a First Nation or Indian band that signed a treaty with the Crown. Registered or Treaty Indians are sometimes also called Status Indians.

### Additional information

Additional information on Aboriginal peoples can be found in the [NHS Data Tables](#), Catalogue nos. 99-011-X2011026 through 99-011-X2011033, the [NHS Profile](#), Catalogue no. 99-010-X, as well as in the [NHS Focus on Geography Series](#), Catalogue no. 99-010-X2011005.

For details on the concepts, definitions, universes, variables and geographic terms used in the 2011 National Household Survey, please consult the [National Household Survey Dictionary](#), Catalogue no. 99-000-X. For detailed explanations on concepts and for information on data quality, please refer to the reference guides found on the [2011 National Household Survey \(NHS\)](#) website.

### Note to readers

**Random rounding and percentage distributions:** To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2011 National Household Survey while maintaining the quality of the results, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values, since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%.

Due to random rounding, estimates and percentages may vary slightly between different 2011 National Household Survey products, such as the analytical documents and various data tables.

**Comparability between estimates from the 2006 Census long form and the 2011 National Household Survey estimates:** When comparing estimates from the 2006 Census long form and estimates from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) users should take into account the fact that the two sources represent different populations. The target population for the 2006 Census long form includes usual residents in collective dwellings and persons living abroad whereas the target population for the NHS excludes them. Moreover, the NHS estimates are derived from a voluntary survey and are therefore subject to potentially higher non-response error than those derived from the 2006 Census long form.

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