

**Policies and Programming for Urban Aboriginal Children**  
**SPEAKING NOTES**  
**FOR A PRESENTATION TO THE**  
**SUB-COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT RISK**  
**OF THE**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT**  
**AND THE**  
**STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**  
**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**OTTAWA**

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**



## **Introduction**

Thank you for inviting the Canada West Foundation to appear today. This Subcommittee is examining a very important issue and we appreciate the opportunity to assist.

The Canada West Foundation is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit public policy research institute dedicated to introducing western perspectives into current Canadian policy debates.

My presentation is based on Canada West's *Urban Aboriginal Initiative*, a recently concluded two-year examination of public policy relating to Aboriginal people in six major western Canadian cities.

Throughout the two years of the *Urban Aboriginal Initiative*, citizen engagement activities helped to inform the work and our findings and recommendations are informed by the views of over 400 people involved in urban Aboriginal policy and programming.

Some members of the Subcommittee may be wondering if research on urban Aboriginal policy in major western Canadian cities is relevant to an examination of off-reserve Aboriginal children from the prenatal period to age six.

Let me assure you that it is.

First, the vast majority of off-reserve Aboriginal people lives in urban areas. Indeed, more off-reserve Aboriginal people live in major metropolitan areas than live in rural areas.

Second, every major city in Canada has large numbers of Aboriginal people, particularly Toronto, Ottawa-Gatineau, Montreal, and Hamilton.

Third, although nearly two-thirds of Canada's urban Aboriginal population lives in western provinces, Aboriginal people live in cities and towns throughout Canada.

Fourth, many of the ideas from the *Urban Aboriginal Initiative* can be applied to other policy files, Aboriginal or otherwise.

In short, the Canada West findings and recommendations are relevant to a discussion of off-reserve Aboriginal children.

### **Federal, Provincial and Municipal Urban Aboriginal Policies and Programming**

As part of our research, we examined policies and programming with respect to urban Aboriginal people in six large western Canadian cities: Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Vancouver, and Winnipeg.

Our research throughout 2001 found no urban Aboriginal-specific policies among federal, provincial, or municipal governments – and almost no enhanced urban Aboriginal programming – for off-reserve Aboriginal children from the prenatal period to age six.

One conclusion we draw from those findings is that the Government of Canada and the four western provincial governments continue to avoid being as active as they could – or should – in urban Aboriginal policy and programming.

We are aware – and acknowledge – that urban Aboriginal people are served by programs that serve other people. However, our research was directed to mapping policies and programs that considered urban Aboriginal people as a discrete client group.

Although based on research and engagement in major western Canadian cities, these policy and program findings are very likely indicative of the situations in many other settings throughout Canada.

### **Promising Practices**

Following from our mapping of policies and programming, we wanted to know what worked – and why these things worked – for urban Aboriginal people.

As a result, we interviewed more than 100 people involved in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming, over one-half of whom were Aboriginal people.

Based on what we were told, we identified 12 promising practices – ideas that work – in urban Aboriginal policy-making and programming.

These promising practices are important for this Subcommittee to consider, as they reflect the wisdom, experience, and knowledge of many front-line workers as well as more senior officials from both within and outside of government.

The promising practices have received broad dissemination and I would be happy to send any interested member of this Subcommittee a copy of the publication that resulted from that research.

## **Conclusion**

This morning the Canada West Foundation released *Shared Responsibility: Final Report and Recommendations of the Urban Aboriginal Initiative*.

The *Final Report* is the culmination of two years of research, citizen engagement, and analysis, and summarizes the work undertaken on the *Urban Aboriginal Initiative*, the findings of those efforts, and presents recommendations on urban Aboriginal policy, programming, and research.

Among the major recommendations of which this Subcommittee should be aware are:

***1. Federal and Provincial Governments Must Be in Urban Aboriginal Policy Together***

***2. Governments Must Set Goals and Evaluate Their Efforts***

***3. Governments Should Not Shy Away From Aboriginal Politics***

***4. Governments Need to Take Principled Approaches***

5. Among the recommendations to specific governments is: The federal government should redirect a portion of its Aboriginal program spending from reserves to urban areas, especially major cities.

Thank you for your attention. Again, I would be happy to send any interested member of this Subcommittee a copy of the publications that came out of the *Urban Aboriginal Initiative*.

I look forward to hearing your questions and wish you success with your work.