

Aboriginal Seniors – A Growing Population

- The most often-cited demographic statistics about Aboriginal communities in Canada are that their populations are on average much younger than the Canadian population overall, with a significant proportion under the age of 25.
- Statistics Canada data reveal that Aboriginal people in Canada are aging faster than the overall Canadian population [1-3], and are unhealthier [4-5].
- The Health Council of Canada recently referred to Aboriginal seniors as among Canada’s most vulnerable citizens [6].
- Very little is known about the aging experiences, aspirations, and support needs of Indigenous seniors.

Health of Aboriginal Seniors is Poorer Than Their non-Aboriginal Counterparts

A recent examination of health status and determinants of health comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal seniors revealed some important disparities [5]:

- Among those aged 55-64, 7% of the Aboriginal population reported three or more chronic conditions, compared with 2% of the non-Aboriginal population.
- The gap is wider among those aged 75 and up, with 51% of Aboriginal people compared with 23% of the non-Aboriginal reporting three or more chronic conditions.
- Those reporting Métis identity are associated with increased odds of fair/poor health status than those reporting First Nations identity [6]
- Aboriginal people living in a rural area are more likely to report fair/poor health than those living in an urban area [6].

Colonization is an Important Determinant of Indigenous* Population Health

- The residential/ boarding school system, attempted to assimilate Indigenous children– starkly stated as “taking Indian out of the child”- by severing the relationship between children and their parents and grandparents, and limiting opportunities for children to be exposed to their Indigenous language and culture.
- Corporal punishment and other forms of abuse were widespread, as was chronic malnutrition[7].
- The intergenerational health outcomes include high levels of both chronic (T2DM, CVD) and infectious (HIV, Hep C, TB) disease, as well as addictions, mental illness, and suicide from youth to old age.

*We use the term Indigenous to refer to the first inhabitants of what is now Canada in a global context that links peoples in similar circumstances of colonization. Where it appears in the text the term Aboriginal refers to a formal recognition of Indigenous people in Canada in the Constitution Act of 1982, as members of three groups: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Terms used in a discussion of cited work reflect those used in source material.

Truth & Reconciliation –Intergenerational Healing and Health

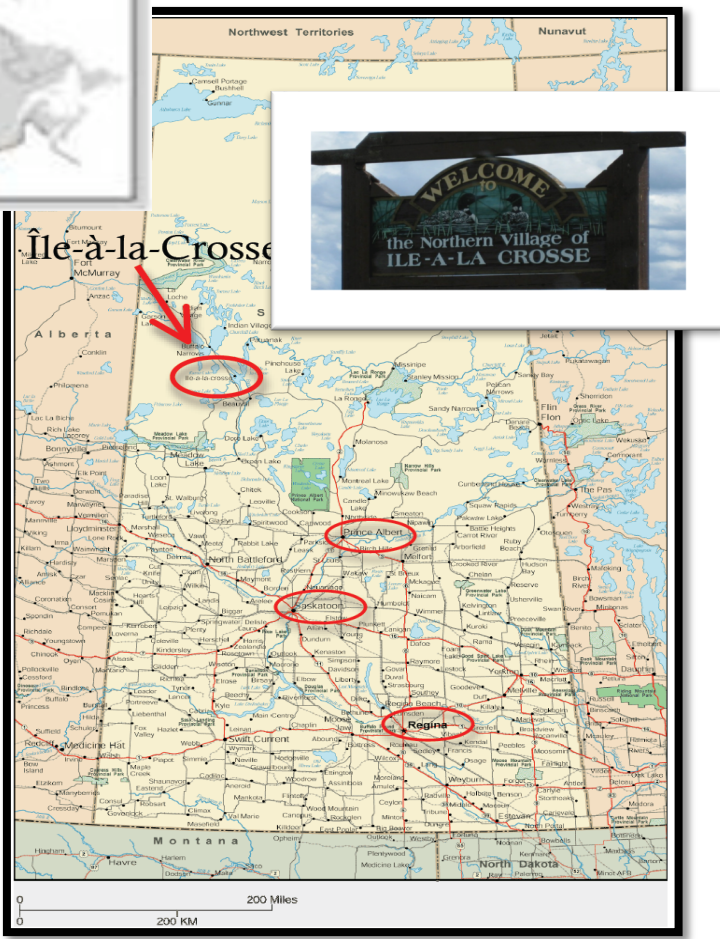
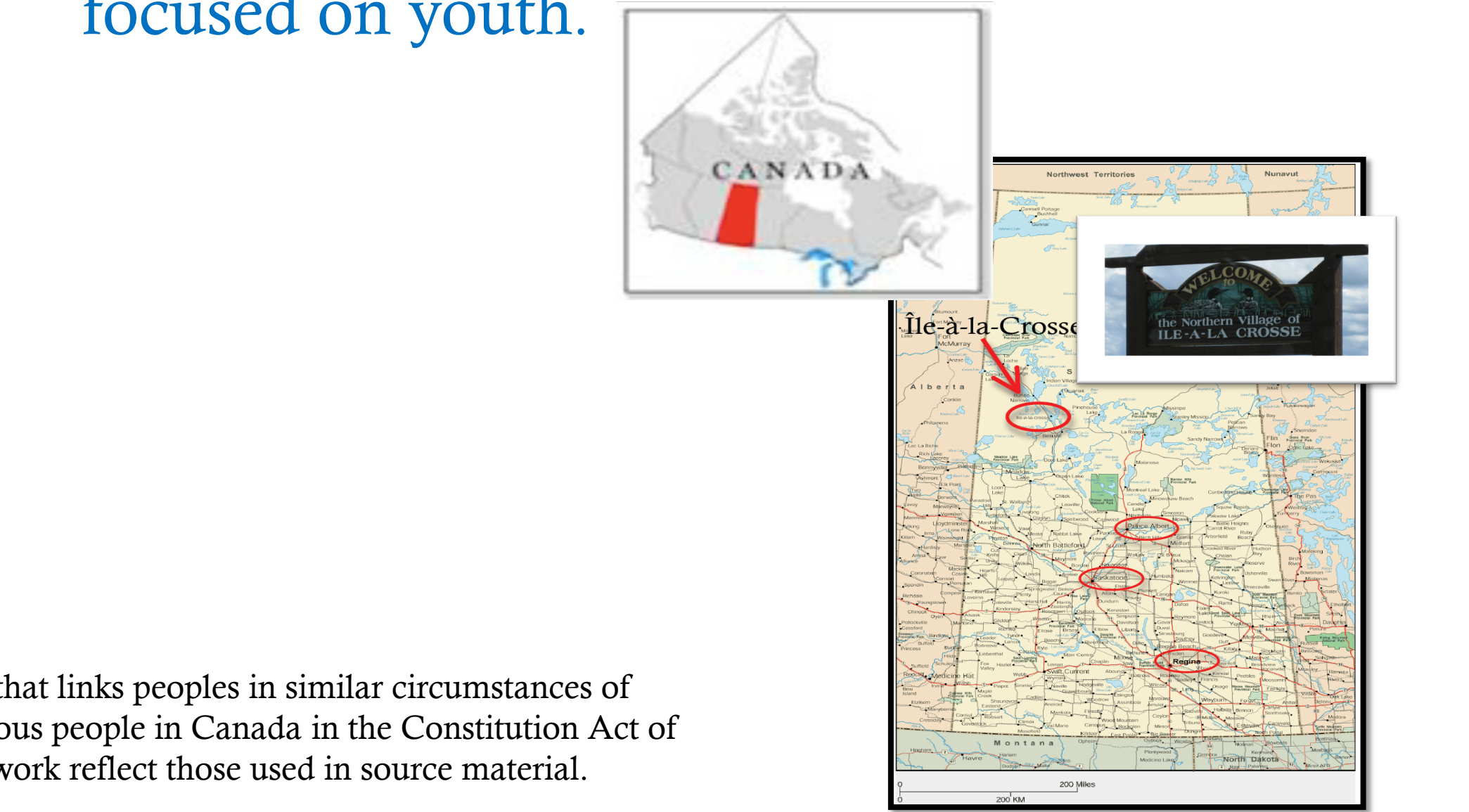
- From 2009-2015 the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** (TRC) of Canada documented the stories of survivors, communities, and others affected by residential schools.
- The **94 Calls to Action** [8] that resulted, and which bid all Canadians to participate, are clear about the importance of creating and maintaining opportunities for **re-establishing the connection of Indigenous children and youth to their languages, cultures, and histories. Elders are those connections.**
- National data indicate that Aboriginal seniors are more likely than non-Aboriginal seniors to be the primary caregivers for their grandchildren [5] and are influential role models to younger generations [9].
- The **close relationship between grandparents and grandchildren** underscores that the well-being of both groups is closely connected.

There is a critical need for research on experiences and aspirations of Indigenous aging that will inform programs and policies to support seniors to age well in their homes –many of which are youthful Indigenous rural communities - because:

1. **Indigenous seniors are a growing population with inequitable outcomes compared to the Canadian senior population overall, and;**
2. **Indigenous Elders are vital to community healing from the impacts of colonization.**

Our research program on healthy aging in a rural Saskatchewan Métis community is framed through two connected projects that consider aging well across the lifecourse:

- **Wuskiwiy-tan! (Let’s Move) is focused on seniors**
- **Tan-Nigahniwhak! (They Will Be Leaders) is focused on youth.**



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