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MODULE 1 Notes

Terminology and Definitions

There are so many different terms that are used when speaking about Indigenous peoples in our country. Some of these terms are quite outdated, and can actually be offensive when used in the wrong context. It is important that we all take time to learn about the language that we use when speaking about other populations and communities so that we are accurate and respectful when discussing issues that impact Indigenous peoples. Chapter 6 is a key resource that will assist you in learning about different words and phrases. I have also included some key points in this document.

Aboriginal

- Aboriginal Peoples – collective name for the First Peoples of Canada – Constitution Act of 1982 (S 35) recognizes three groups – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit
- Aboriginal people (lower case) – refers to more than one Aboriginal person
- Try not to use “Aboriginal Peoples” to identify only one of these groups – specific language is preferred
- Important: Aboriginal is not a proper noun (despite its wide use in the media) – this term is only to be used as a modifier

Indigenous

- Indigenous – means ‘native to the area’
- Can be used internationally
- Used by the United Nations, for example
- Preferred by some to ‘Aboriginal’
- Please capitalize when referring to people

First Nations

- First Nations People – term that came into common play in the 1970s – preferred term over 'Indian' (though this is largely used in Canadian policy)
- Includes both Status and non-Status people (as defined under the Indian Act)
- Not a synonym for Aboriginal Peoples, as the term does not include Métis and Inuit peoples
- Above all, refer to the specific Nation whenever possible
- Previously 'Native' was a popular term to use, but has become outdated

Métis

- Métis - "a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of Historic Métis Nation ancestry, and is accepted by the Métis Nation" (MNC, 2002)
- Some people refer to anyone of mixed heritage as Métis, but this is incorrect

Inuit

- Inuit – means "people" in Inuktitut; Indigenous people in Northern Canada as well as in other circumpolar areas across the globe (terms may vary)
- Singular for Inuit is 'Inuk' (one person)
- "Eskimo" is a term that was used by European explorers – it is offensive to Inuit people

Demographic Information

According to the 2016 Census data, there are 1,673,785 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Canada (making up 4.9% of the total population). Of this population, most people identified as First Nations (58.4%). More than one-third of the Indigenous population in Canada identified as Métis (35.1%), and a small proportion were Inuit (3.9%).

The Indigenous population in Canada is young and growing. The average age of Indigenous people in Canada is 32 years, which is 8 years younger than the average for non-Indigenous people. Additionally, 1 in 4 Indigenous people in Canada are under the age of 15.



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