

# Facts on Aboriginal Women's Health

*Titbits...on women's health*

## Life Expectancy

- In 2001, life expectancy at birth for Aboriginal women was 76.8 years – over 5 years less than for non-Aboriginal women whose life expectancy was 82 years

## Excellent or Very Good Health

- 54% of Aboriginal women living off-reserve reported either excellent or very good health, compared to 59% of all Canadian women
- Among women aged 65 and over, just 23% of Aboriginal women compared to 36% of all senior women described their health as either excellent or very good
- Only 41% of Aboriginal women aged 45 to 64, compared to 55% of all women this age reported their health as either excellent or very good

## Fair or Poor Health

- 45% of off-reserve Aboriginal women 65 years and older described their health as fair or poor, compared to 29% of the total senior women's population
- Twice as many Aboriginal women between 45 and 64 years of age reported fair or poor health – 33% of Aboriginal women compared to 16% of all women

## Chronic Health Conditions

- 52% of Aboriginal women living off reserve were diagnosed with a chronic health condition by a health professional compared with 44% of Aboriginal men
- 7% of Aboriginal women living off reserve aged 15 and over had been diagnosed with diabetes, compared with 3% of the total Canadian female population
- More than twice as many Aboriginal women aged 65 and over had diabetes compared to all Canadian senior women – 24% compared to 11%

## Smoking

- 39% of all Aboriginal women aged 15 and over reported they smoked daily, compared with 20% of the total female Canadian population

**Please copy and distribute freely to women you know and work with.**

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective's *Titbits* are not intended to endorse or recommend particular treatments, explanations or products but rather to facilitate your own search for health resources. Please see your health practitioner for more information.



## **Barriers to Aboriginal Women's Health**

### **Residential Schools**

The First Nations Regional Health Survey, conducted between 2002-2003 with the participation of 22,426 First Nations people (representing 246 First Nations communities), reports that the legacy of residential school negatively affects the health of Aboriginal people. Of the adults interviewed:

- 1 in 5 (19.8%) attended residential school
- Of those who attended, 47.9% reported that their health and well-being were negatively affected by their attendance
- Reasons for this included separation from family and community, verbal and emotional abuse, loss of language and cultural identity, harsh disciplining, witnessing abuse, loss of traditional religion or spirituality, physical abuse, bullying, poor education, lack of food, harsh living conditions, lack of proper clothing and sexual abuse

### **Spousal Violence**

- Three times as many Aboriginal women as non-Aboriginal women experienced spousal violence from either a current or previous partner in the 5 years previous to the 2004 General Social Survey – 24% of Aboriginal women compared to 8% of non-Aboriginal women

### **Access to Health Care Professionals**

- 80% of Aboriginal women 15 years and over living off reserve had seen or talked to a family doctor or general practitioner in the 12 months prior to 2001 – 20% had not
- Aboriginal women experience poor access to treatment opportunities, evident in statistics for cervical cancer death rates among Aboriginal women during a 30 year period in BC: 33.9 per 100, 000 population, compared to 8.1 among non-Aboriginal women

Note: The figures reflect Statistics Canada's definition of the term Aboriginal population, which includes "North American Indians, Metis and Inuit."

#### Sources:

Women in Canada, A gender-based statistical report. Statistics Canada, 2005 (with data from the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey).

Losing Ground: The Effects of Government Cutbacks on Women in British Columbia, 2001-2005. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, 2005.

First Nations Regional Health Survey. National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2004.

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July 2006

