



Adult Health

Information from the national and regional reports of the 1997 *First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Surveys*

What Questions Did The Regional Health Surveys Ask About The Health Of Adults?

The Regional Health Surveys (RHS) included some questions that were the same across the whole country and some questions that were only asked in particular regions. The national questions asked about people's physical health, including:

- Chronic conditions like diabetes or high blood pressure
- Activity limitations
- Dental health

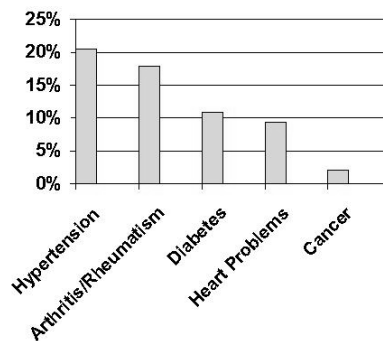


Chronic Conditions

Chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer, and arthritis/rheumatism are widespread. Overall, 46 per cent of adults reported having been diagnosed with one or more of these conditions. Smokers are at an even greater risk. Unlike earlier research, the RHS results suggest all of

these conditions are more common in First Nations People and Inuit than in the general Canadian population: age-standardized rates range from 1.5 to five times the national average.

Crude Prevalence of Selected Chronic Conditions
1997 RHS National Results



Chronic conditions are associated with a lot of activity limitation such as being unable to take short trips or needing help with personal care. Depending on the specific condition, 24 to 38 per cent of the people with chronic conditions report some degree of activity limitation.

People with chronic conditions are far more likely than others to rate their overall health as poor and to feel there should be improvements in health care services such as:





- More health staff
- Chronic care facilities
- Home care
- Education about medications
- Preventive education, and
- Mental health services

Chronic conditions are becoming more common. Historically, First Nations Peoples and Inuit had lower rates of cancer and heart disease than average, but it seems that this is no longer the case. The RHS found higher rates of all chronic conditions than the last national survey of Aboriginal Peoples in 1991.

There has been concern in recent years that First Nations Peoples develop conditions such as diabetes at younger ages than other Canadians. Although the national report did not analyze the age of onset of chronic conditions, British Columbia's report did.

Average Age at Diagnosis First Nations Peoples in British Columbia, 1997	
Arthritis	35 years
Cancer	36 years
Hypertension	36 years
Heart problems	37 years
Diabetes	42 years



Activity Limitations

Chronic diseases or injuries can result in activity limitation. The RHS asked about limitations such as trouble taking trips, needing help with personal care such as grooming, or being housebound.

Overall, 15 per cent of adults had some degree of activity limitation.

People who had several chronic conditions were especially likely to report being limited in the activities they could do. Because rates of chronic disease are high in the First Nations and Inuit populations, and even some middle-aged people have more than one chronic condition, disability rates may increase in future.

Less than a third of people with activity limitations believe First Nations Peoples and Inuit get the same level of health care as other Canadians. When asked which on a list of health services need improvement, they tend to mention:

- Continuing-care services (such as seniors' homes and chronic care facilities)
- Medication-awareness programs
- Dialysis, and
- Translation services.





Dental Health

Across the country, the dental health of First Nations adults appears to be poor even though more than half the population had seen a dentist in the past year.

About 48 per cent of adults said they needed dental treatment and almost a quarter had had dental pain or a dental problem during the previous month. Younger adults were particularly likely to need dental treatment. These findings apply to most communities, no matter what their size, level of isolation, health transfer status, or language.

These figures suggest the biggest need may be for better prevention of dental problems. Better brushing habits, fluoride supplements, or fluoridation of community water supplies might help.



About the Regional Health Surveys

The statistics in this Fact Sheet are drawn from the 1997 *First Nations and Inuit Regional Health Surveys*.

The surveys covered people living in 186 First Nations communities spread across most of southern Canada and in the Inuit communities of Labrador. The surveys did not include people living off-reserve, in the North or in the James Bay area of Quebec. All told, the survey included 9,870 adults.

Sampling methods varied from one region to another. Also, the definition of adult varied. British Columbia considered anyone older than 16 years to be an adult while other regions counted anyone 18 and older to be an adult.