

## Loving Our Children: Finding What Works for First Nations Families

Canada Research Chair in First Nations Child and Family Services  
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### Information Sheet #15

# First Nations Foster Children Aged 0 to 14 Living On and Off Reserve, by Province and Territory

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This information sheet presents the estimated numbers of First Nations children, aged 0 to 14, living on and off reserve by province and territory, who are counted as foster children in private households in the 2021 Census of Canada. (See [Information Sheet #14, Estimated Counts of First Nations Children Living On and Off Reserve, by Province and Territory](#) for a breakdown of how those First Nations children are counted.) Rates are shown separately for First Nations children living on reserve, First Nations children living off reserve, and non-Indigenous children, allowing a provincial and territorial comparison of foster placement rates across the three groups.

The breakdowns presented here extend the analyses published by Statistics Canada in [Indigenous foster children living in private households: Rates and sociodemographic characteristics of foster children and their households](#).<sup>2</sup> That report established that in 2021 in Canada, 41.8 per 1,000 First Nations children were identified in the Census as being foster children, compared to 2.3 per 1,000 non-Indigenous children, and that the rate of First Nations foster children living off reserve (49.9 per 1,000) was twice as high as on reserve (24.6 per 1,000). It did not, however, disaggregate this on/off reserve breakdown by province or territory. The rates in Table 1 (below) fill that gap.

This information sheet is [one in a series](#)<sup>1</sup> about child welfare, written for First Nations developing child and family prevention services as part of the systemic reform underway across Canada.

### How are Foster Children Identified in the Census?

Since 2011, Question 7 in the Census questionnaire has included *foster child* as a response option to the question asking respondents to describe how each household member is related to the person completing the questionnaire. No definition of foster child is provided on the questionnaire, so identification relies on how the respondent interprets the term. As a result, it is not possible to determine the extent to which children in various forms of kinship care are identified by respondent as foster children. (See [Information Sheet #5, What is Out-of-home Care?](#)<sup>3</sup>) Because the Census only covers private households, it does not capture children in group care, residential treatment or other institutional placements. Census counts of foster children will therefore differ from First Nations, provincial and territorial administrative caseload figures, which use their own definitions and inclusion criteria.

**Table 1. Rate of Foster Children Aged 0 To 14 per 1,000 Children Living In Private Households, First Nations On Reserve, First Nations Off Reserve, and Non-Indigenous, by Province and Territory, Canada, 2021**

Province / Territory	First Nations, on reserve	First Nations, off reserve	Non-Indigenous
Newfoundland and Labrador	46.4	13.4	5.0
Prince Edward Island	0.0	0.0	1.5
Nova Scotia	24.6	2.5	3.3
New Brunswick	18.2	27.8	5.2
Quebec	33.5	25.8	4.6
Ontario	19.8	26.0	1.3
Manitoba	33.2	115.6	2.3
Saskatchewan	23.7	43.0	1.5
Alberta	15.6	69.7	1.2
British Columbia	17.0	48.7	1.3
Yukon	—	30.9	0.0
Northwest Territories	—	26.0	2.8
Nunavut	—	—	—
<b>Canada</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>49.9</b>	<b>2.3</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population, Table 98-10-0276-01. Rates are calculated as the number of foster children aged 0 to 14 in private households divided by the total number of children aged 0 to 14 in private households in the same province or territory and population group (First Nations on reserve, First Nations off reserve, or non-Indigenous), multiplied by 1,000. Counts have been randomly rounded to base 5 by Statistics Canada to protect respondent privacy; small cells therefore produce unstable rates, particularly for the Atlantic provinces and the territories. Cells shown as “—” indicate that there were zero First Nations children counted on reserve in that territory (Yukon and Nunavut have no reserves under the Indian Act). Unlike Hahmann, Lee & Godin (2024), these rates have not been adjusted for the 63 First Nations Census Subdivisions (CSDs) that were incompletely enumerated in the 2021 Census; the on-reserve rate in provinces with a large number of incompletely enumerated CSDs (particularly British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec) may therefore be understated.

## What the Numbers Show

- **The rate of First Nations children in foster care is far higher than the non-Indigenous rate in every province and territory.**

Nationally, the rate is 24.6 per 1,000 on reserve and 49.9 per 1,000 off reserve, compared with 2.3 per 1,000 for non-Indigenous children.

- **In the four Western provinces, the off-reserve rate exceeds the on-reserve rate.** In Manitoba, the off-reserve rate (115.6 per 1,000) is more than three times the on-reserve rate (33.2). Alberta shows a similar pattern (69.7

off reserve vs 15.6 on reserve), as do British Columbia (48.7 vs 17.0) and Saskatchewan (43.0 vs 23.7).

- **The pattern is reversed in the Atlantic provinces.** In Newfoundland and Labrador and in Nova Scotia, First Nations foster child rates on reserve are noticeably higher than off reserve (46.4 vs 13.4 in NL; 24.6 vs 2.5 in NS). The small size of the underlying counts calls for cautious interpretation of these Atlantic rates.
- **Quebec and Ontario show comparable on-reserve and off-reserve rates.** In Quebec, the

rate on reserve (33.5) is somewhat higher than off reserve (25.8); in Ontario, the off-reserve rate (26.0) is somewhat higher than the on-reserve rate (19.8).

## Why These Numbers Matter for Prevention Funding

The provincial and residence-based variation shown in Table 1 has direct implications for how prevention services for First Nations children and families should be funded. First Nations are left to navigate fragmented funding and program frameworks that have led to unacceptable disparities. The off-reserve First Nations foster child rate in Manitoba (115.6 per 1,000) is more than eight times the off-reserve rate in Newfoundland and Labrador (13.4), and more than 50 times the non-Indigenous rate in Manitoba (2.3). At the same time, the on-reserve rate in Newfoundland and Labrador (46.4) is nearly three times the on-reserve rate in Alberta (15.6). These differences reflect real variation in the risks and stresses facing First Nations children and families across provinces, in the reach and effectiveness of prevention services, and in the historical and ongoing pressures on the child welfare systems that serve them.

The pattern of higher off-reserve rates in the Prairies and British Columbia is particularly consequential. Although a majority of First Nations children in these provinces live off reserve (as documented in [Information Sheet #14, First Nations Children Living On and Off Reserve, by Province and Territory](#)<sup>4</sup>), the jurisdictional line between federal and provincial funding responsibilities does not align with the population that is entering foster care. As First Nations exercise inherent jurisdiction over child and family services for their citizens under *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth*

*and families* (2019), prevention services need to follow the family—on reserve, in urban centres and across provincial and territorial lines — with funding that reflects need rather than residency alone.<sup>5</sup>

## Additional Methodological Notes

The data presented in this information sheet is publicly available through the Statistics Canada website. Information about how to obtain on/off reserve First Nations child population counts is described in Information Sheet #14, while details specific to foster children identified in the Census are presented below.

### ***Where Can Census Foster Child Data Be Obtained?***

Estimated counts of foster children can be obtained from the [Statistics Canada customizable Census 2021 Table 98-10-0276-01](#),<sup>6</sup> *Household and family characteristics of persons including detailed information on stepfamilies by Indigenous identity and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces and territories*. Foster children are identified as a subcategory of “persons not in census families” in the household and family characteristics variable. The population count of children in each identity × residence × province cell serves as the denominator for the rate calculations.

### ***What Age Range Is Used?***

Rates are presented for children aged 0 to 14. This age range matches the age scope used by Hahmann, Lee & Godin (2024), and reflects the most detailed age grouping available in Table 98-10-0276-01 that captures the pre-adolescent and early adolescent population. A rate for children aged 0 to 17 cannot be calculated directly from the publicly available table without a custom tabulation, because the age variable groups 15- to 19-year-olds together.

*If you would like to share information about a First Nations child and family support initiative in your community, the Loving Our Children project researchers would like to hear from you. [LOCwhatworks@gmail.com](mailto:LOCwhatworks@gmail.com)*

## Suggested Citation

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## Endnotes

- 1 <https://cwrp.ca/loving-our-children>
- 2 Hahmann, T., Lee, H. & Godin, S. (2024). *Indigenous foster children living in private households: Rates and sociodemographic characteristics of foster children and their households*. Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 41-20-0002. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/41-20-0002/412000022024001-eng.pdf?st=wAnnw-dl>
- 3 <https://cwrp.ca/publications/what-is-out-home-care>
- 4 <https://cwrp.ca/publications/estimated-counts-first-nations-children-living-and-reserve-province-and-territory>
- 5 <https://www.canlii.org/en/mb/mbkb/doc/2026/2026mbkb65/2026mbkb65.html?resultId=60ad5ab47e0c4790941b88381168b475&searchId=2026-06-03T15:02:52:644/01859c0d41bf4b7d8a9f5e50ba7a287d>
- 6 Statistics Canada. (2022). *Household and family characteristics of persons including detailed information on stepfamilies by Indigenous identity and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces and territories* (2021 Census of Population, Table 98-10-0276-01). Custom filter: Age = Total 0 to 14; Household and family characteristic = Foster children and Total; Indigenous identity = First Nations (single response) and Non-Indigenous identity; Residence by Indigenous geography = On reserve, Off reserve, Total on/off reserve; Registered or Treaty Indian status = Total; Gender = Total; Statistics = Count. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810027601>

