

THE CANADIAN RECONCILIATION LANDSCAPE

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND NON-INDIGENOUS CANADIANS

BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, we have witnessed growing momentum in the reconciliation movement in Canada. We have an opportunity now more than ever, to create a new way forward in our relationships with one another. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in its final report placed much of the responsibility for this change on governments and Indigenous leaders, but it will also require meaningful engagement among Indigenous Peoples and other peoples in Canada.

This raises the question of what the collective perspective currently is among both populations with respect to reconciliation and the journey ahead. Do Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians share a similar or distinct view on reconciliation? Is there a basis for common ground upon which to build a path forward? What areas of divergence might exist that represent significant barriers requiring attention?

National survey of Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians

To answer these questions, Reconciliation Canada commissioned a national public opinion survey to measure the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians on key aspects of reconciliation, identifying areas of alignment and divergence with respect to the following themes:

- The need for reconciliation
- How reconciliation is perceived
- Barriers to reconciliation
- Support for reconciliation actions
- Responsibility for reconciliation

By developing an accurate understanding of the perspectives of both populations at this point in time, we can begin to identify areas of congruence and opportunity as well as current obstacles to progress. It is important to publicize the results broadly to dispel inaccurate assumptions and stereotypes about general attitudes toward Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations and reconciliation.

The research consisted of online surveys conducted with representative samples of Indigenous Peoples (N=521) and non-Indigenous Canadians (n=1,529) in September 2016. Detailed survey data available upon request.

*Please note an adjustment has been made to the terminology in the report, replacing 'Aboriginal', as it appeared in the original questionnaire, with 'Indigenous'. This reflects recent changes in the political and legal landscape both within Canada and the broader international community.

KEY FINDINGS

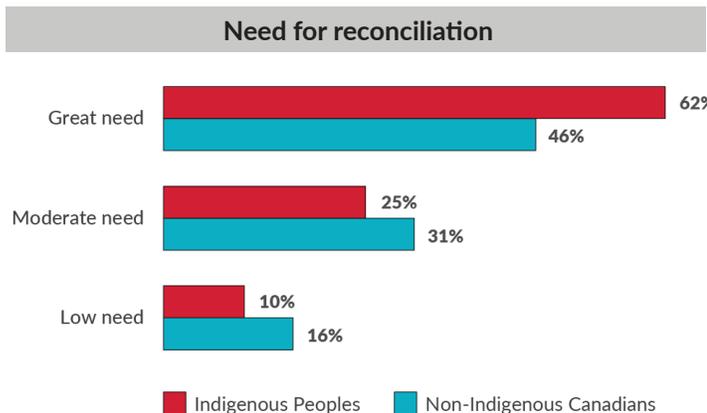
The survey reveals that Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians share remarkably similar perspectives on most aspects of reconciliation. Indigenous Peoples tend to feel stronger and/or hold more definitive views in many cases, but this reflects a difference in the intensity of views held rather than a difference of opinion.



The need for reconciliation

There is general agreement among both populations that the current relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians is much more negative than positive. What, underlies this belief are shared perceptions of discrimination and racism, negative stereotypes, social and economic disparities, an absence of dialogue, and a mutual sense of mistrust.

Both populations also further agree on the need for reconciliation between them, although Indigenous Peoples feel stronger about this (62% say there is a great need, compared with 46% of other Canadians).

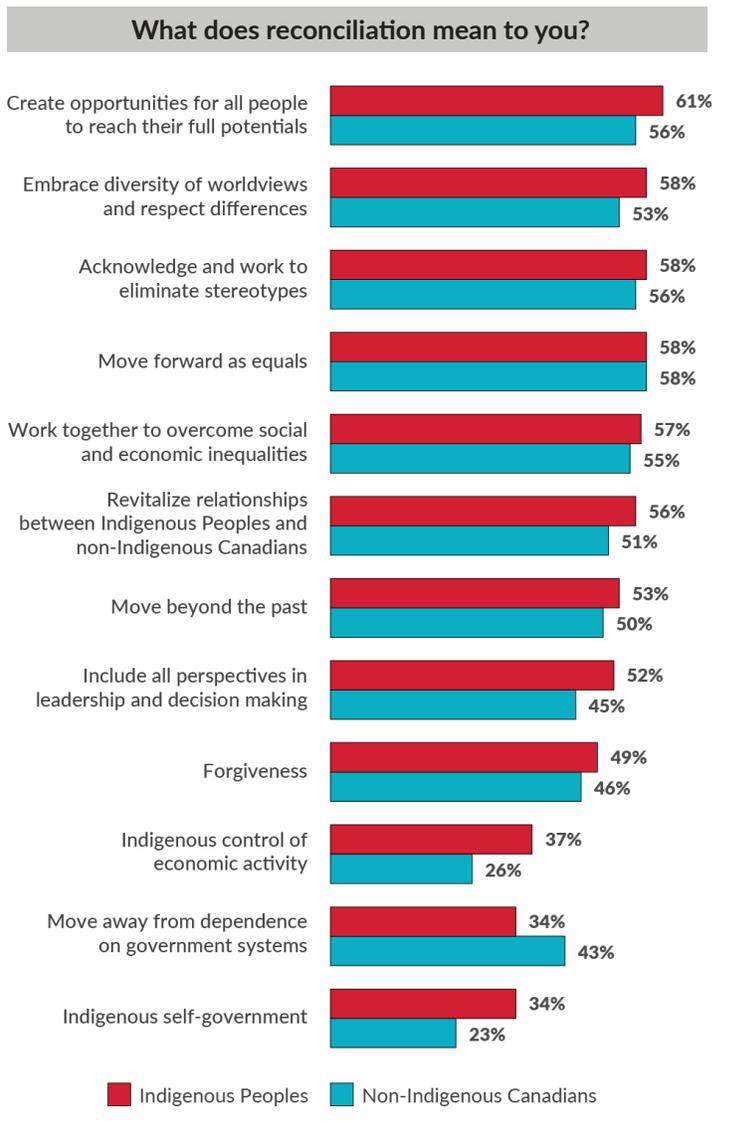


How is reconciliation perceived?

Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians may agree on the need for reconciliation, but are they thinking about the same thing? Results from the survey confirm the answer in broad terms is yes: Both populations think about reconciliation in a similar way in terms of the words and phrases they use to describe it.

Shared conceptions of reconciliation centre on three themes: a) creating greater equality between both populations; b) working together to create opportunities and reduce barriers; and c) moving beyond the past and away from a dependency on government.

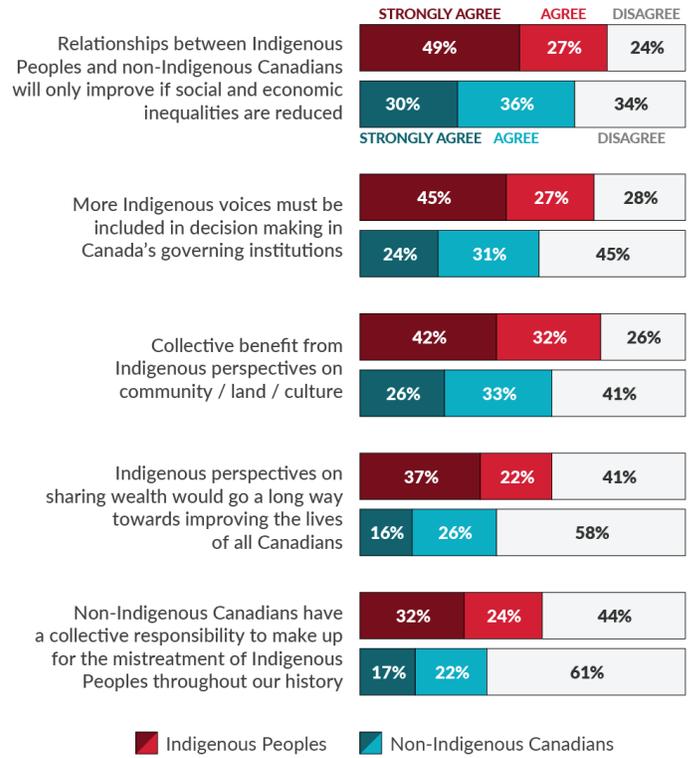
A few aspects of reconciliation are given more emphasis by Indigenous Peoples (e.g., Indigenous control over economic activity and self-government), while non-Indigenous Canadians are more apt to think of reconciliation in terms of moving away from dependence on government systems.



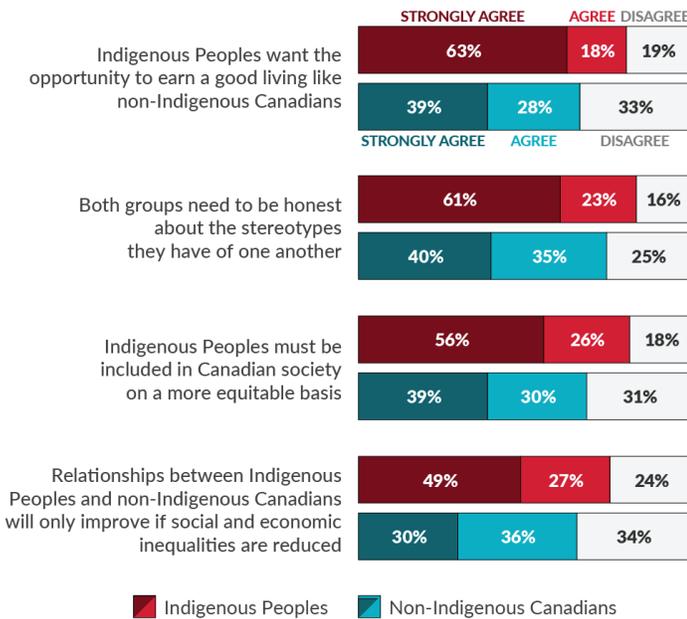


Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians are also in agreement on a number of aspects about reconciliation, notably the value of acknowledging the unique contributions of Indigenous Peoples to Canadian society, as well as providing for greater opportunity and equality for Indigenous Peoples. The two populations are further aligned on taking steps towards the necessary institutional reform and individual changes required to move reconciliation forward.

Attitudes towards reconciliation



Attitudes about reconciliation



At the same time, the two populations differ noticeably in the strength of opinions about reconciliation in terms of the necessity of addressing the past, and Indigenous perspectives on issues such as wealth sharing and decision-making.





Support for reconciliation actions

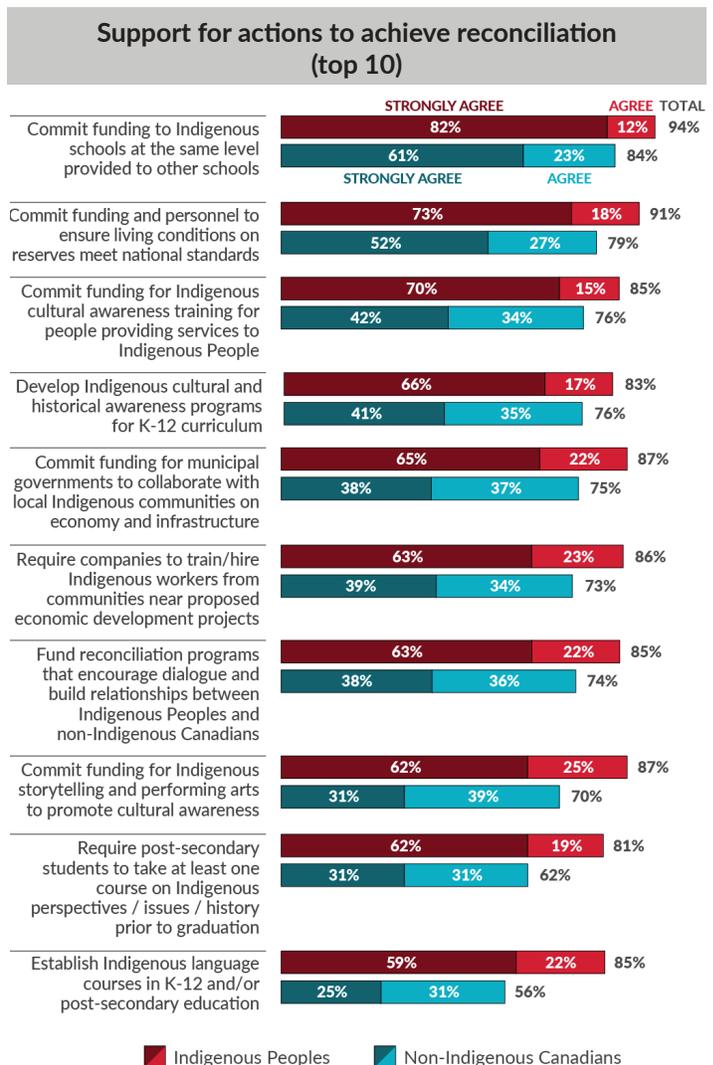
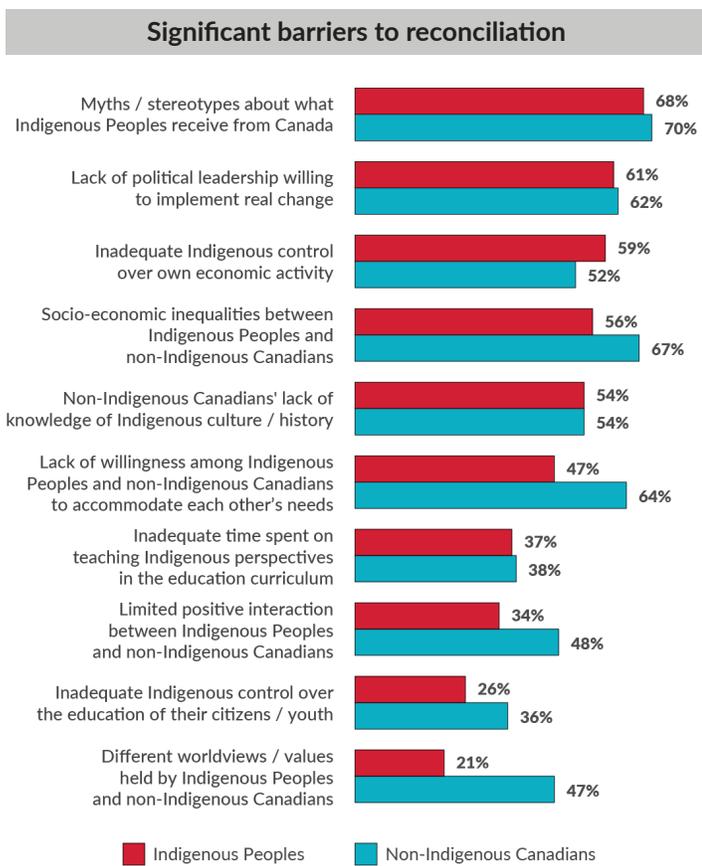
Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians voice support for a similar set of actions to move reconciliation forward. Clear majorities from both populations express strong or moderate support to say they strongly or somewhat support each of 19 proposed reconciliation actions, although strong support levels are higher among Indigenous Peoples in most cases.

Across the list, the strongest support is expressed for increased funding in a number of areas, including Indigenous schools, living conditions on reserves, cultural awareness training for people providing services to Indigenous people, youth-focused reconciliation programs, and reconciliation programs that promote dialogue and build relationships.

Strong majority support is also voiced by both populations for steps to support local economic development by requiring companies to train and/or hire Indigenous workers, and denying project development until affected Indigenous communities grant approval.

Barriers to reconciliation

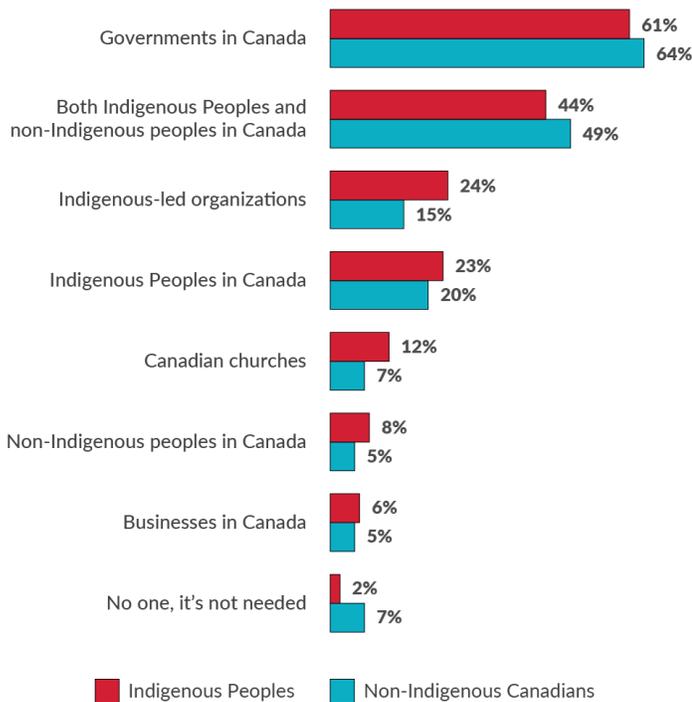
Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians identify a similar set of major barriers to achieving reconciliation, principally regarding what is perceived as a dysfunctional relationship and mistrust of the other, socio-economic inequalities, and an absence of political leadership. Indigenous Peoples are more likely to consider barriers to be major ones, but the two populations generally agree on which represent the most significant barriers still to overcome.



Responsibility for reconciliation

Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians alike identify governments as being most responsible for funding actions to bring about reconciliation. Of equal importance, a significant proportion of all respondents consider this the collective responsibility of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Smaller percentages list Indigenous Peoples, specifically Indigenous-led organizations, followed by Canadian churches, non-Indigenous Canadians, and businesses in Canada as holding responsibility.

Who is most responsible for leadership in bringing about reconciliation?

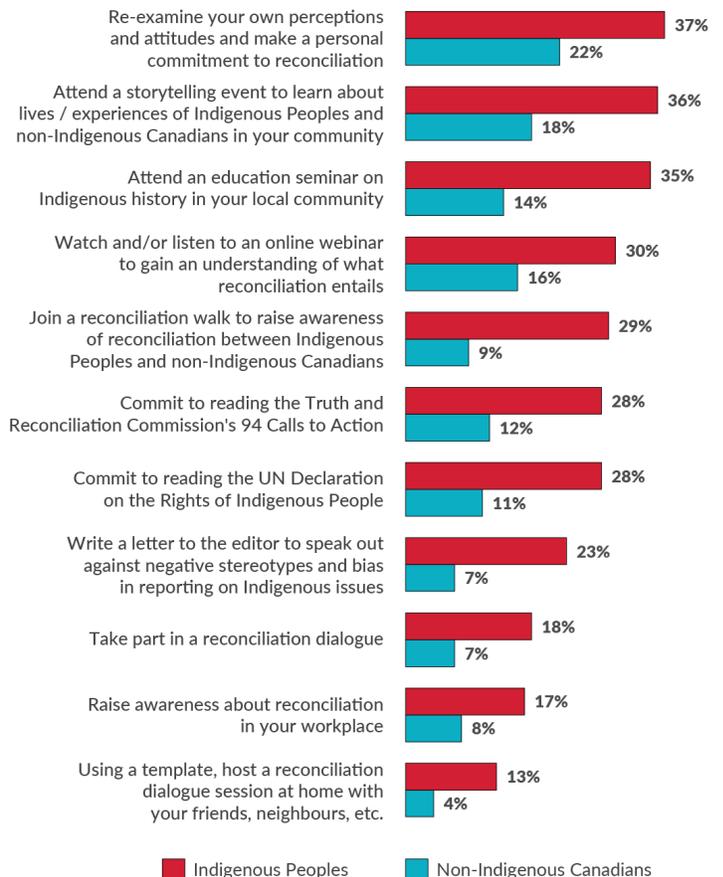


The majority of individuals in both populations also say they would be prepared to take one or more specific actions to help bring about reconciliation, involving both active and passive steps. In all cases, Indigenous Peoples are more likely than non-Indigenous Canadians to indicate an intention to act.



Respondents from both samples say they would be most likely to commit their time to re-examine their individual perceptions and attitudes, participate in educational events (webinars, local seminars, storytelling events), and read relevant reconciliation material (UN Declaration, TRC 94 Calls to Action).

Very likely to take personal actions to support reconciliation





CONCLUSION

This study is the first national survey to address perspectives on reconciliation among both Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. The results reveal a striking alignment of views about the importance of achieving reconciliation, how it is currently perceived, barriers to achieving it, and the types of actions — both collective and personal — that are required for to make reconciliation a reality.

Opinions and attitudes, however hopeful, will not alone be sufficient to heal the historic and current divisions among Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. But they matter greatly in reflecting commonly shared aspirations of both populations for a better collective and provide an important starting point for genuine progress.

While we have an incredible window of opportunity to create lasting change, maintaining the momentum will require a shared commitment by all peoples. This poses

the question of what now are the barriers to achieving reconciliation? How can you, as a reader of this report, take action to contribute to the reconciliation movement?

About Reconciliation Canada  Reconciliation Canada

Born from the vision of Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, Gwawae-nuk Elder, Reconciliation Canada is a charitable, non-partisan, national organization that promotes reconciliation by engaging Canadians from every part of society in open and honest dialogue and transformative experiences that revitalize relationships among Indigenous peoples and all Canadians. Its initiatives include reconciliation dialogue workshops, reconciliation leadership learning experiences, economic reconciliation, and public awareness activities.

Reconciliation Canada thanks all who contributed to the production of this survey report, including Daniel Savas of Savas Consulting, Discourse Media and Keith Neuman of The Environics Institute.