



## Fact Sheet

This fact sheet presents an overview of the First Peoples' Cultural Council's 2014 Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages.

### WHY REPORT ON THE STATUS OF B.C. FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES?

British Columbia is rich with a great diversity of First Nations languages and cultures. B.C. is home to 60% of First Nations languages in Canada with 34 unique languages. In 2010, we took a close look at this diversity with the publication of our *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages*. Four years later, we are very pleased to present the second edition of this report. Our new report provides an update on the current status of B.C.'s First Nations languages.

In our 2010 report, we aimed to identify the status of languages in British Columbia, provide evidence for the urgency to act, and give direction on successful language revitalization strategies to inspire action. The 2014 statistics show that, while progress is being made in terms of increased semi-speakers, much more work needs to be done while fluent speakers are still with us.

### FINDINGS

Based on three variables for measuring language status (speakers, usage and language resources), all of the First Nations languages in British Columbia continue to face challenges to their vitality. This report provides statistics on 185 out of 203 First Nations communities and a total population of 129,730.

### **Language Speakers**

- In 2014, fluent speakers of First Nations languages make up 4.08% (5,289) of the total population reported.
- Semi-fluent speakers make up 9.32% (12,092) of the population reported. This is an increase of 3,144 speakers over the 2010 numbers,
- While 59% of fluent speakers are aged 65 and over, nearly one in three semi-fluent speakers (29%) are under the age of 25. In fact, 88% of all semi-fluent speakers are under the age of 65.

### **Usage (Language in Education)**

- First Nations language learners make up 9.14% of the population reported to us (11,862).
- The amount of language instruction per week ranges from none at all to full immersion, but the average is 5.73 hours per week per First Nations-operated school.

### **Language Resources**

- 120 communities (65% of those reported to us) have recordings of their language available as a community resource. This number has more than doubled since 2010.
- Only 97 communities (52%) have any sort of curriculum materials for teaching the languages. Many of these curricula are very limited and have not been developed for many levels of language learners.

- 117 communities (63% of those reported to us) have access to a FirstVoices.com archive of their language, and other communities may use different archiving systems. This number has significantly increased from 2010, where only 66 communities (or 39% of those reporting) had access.

## WHY ARE THERE SO FEW SPEAKERS OF B.C. FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES?

The dramatic decline in B.C. First Nations languages since the late 1800s is largely due to the following causes:

- The Canadian government’s mandated assimilation policies which outlawed First Nations cultural practices and separated First Nations communities from their land
- The Residential School system followed by Indian Day Schools that removed First Nations children from their homes and forbade them to speak their languages
- Social, industrial and cultural pressures from the dominant English-speaking society
- Exclusion of First Nations languages from government, commerce, industry, arts, education and media

## WHY IS LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION IMPORTANT TODAY?

First and foremost, this is a human rights issue. Language loss is part of the oppression and disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that “Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.”<sup>1</sup> Language is the way a culture is transmitted—it represents the identity of a people and holds cultural, historical, scientific and ecological knowledge. When a language is lost, we all lose out on the knowledge held within it and the unique way its speakers view the world.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE TO REVITALIZE LANGUAGES?

The status of B.C. First Nations languages is critical, but the report recognizes that there is considerable work being done in communities to revitalize languages. Actions include:

- Collaborating to share ideas and resources, as well as overcome common challenges
- Creating new speakers by participating in a variety of immersion programs for children, youth and adults
- Recording, documenting and archiving languages
- Developing short- and long-term revitalization plans to benefit communities across language groups

## HOW WAS THIS INFORMATION GATHERED?

The 2010-2014 data used in this report derives from our database of Language Needs Assessments (LNAs) that are completed by community organizations each time they apply for funding through the First Peoples’ Cultural Council. This data is the most accurate available since it comes directly from First Nations communities and is constantly updated whenever a new language needs assessment is filled out.

To download the full report, go to [www.fpcc.ca](http://www.fpcc.ca).

*“The number one thing is leading by example. I’m teaching the basics and I started with no language at all. And I am proof that it can be done.”*

Adam Manson, Hul’q’umi’num’ language learner  
Snuneymuxw First Nation

<sup>1</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2008). *United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples*. Geneva: United Nations. Retrieved May 23, 2014 from [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)