

FACT SHEET: REPORT ON THE STATUS OF *B.C. First Nations Languages*

Fourth Edition, 2022



This fact sheet is an overview of the First Peoples' Cultural Council's 2022 Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages.



Report on the Progress of Language Revitalization in B.C.

British Columbia is unique within Canada with 34 distinct First Nations languages originating from this land. Every four years, the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) surveys First Nations communities to collect information that tracks the accomplishments around language learning and celebrates the successes we see over time. This report is the fourth edition.

The goal of the report is to provide current information to First Nations communities and leadership and all levels of government to assist with language planning and revitalization. We also hope this information will be useful to the general public so they can learn more about the languages in the regions where they live. This year, we are pleased to report several areas of growth, due in large part to increased funding from provincial and federal governments. Long-term sustainable funding will be needed to continue the positive momentum.

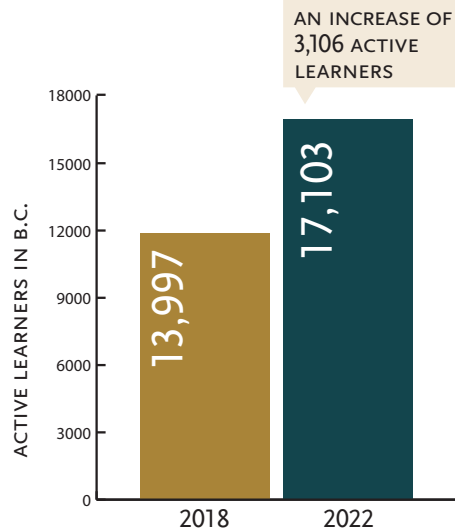
Increase in Semi-Speakers and Learners

To assess language status, we request information from First Nations across the province about where and how language is being used, from early childhood programs to adult learning opportunities. Out of 204 First Nations communities, 167 contributed. (Some communities have more than one language, so in total there are 180/218 datasets.) The total population of these reporting communities is 140,195.

Increased investment in language revitalization has created many more language learning opportunities. Communities have been working very hard and we are

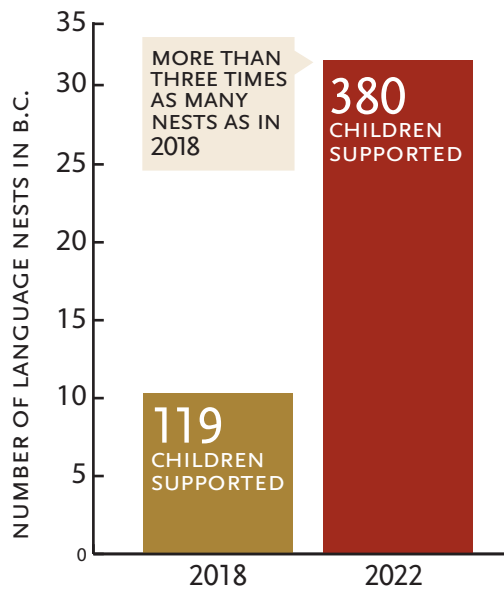
excited to share that there are growing numbers of speakers and more language learners than ever before.

- There are **3,370 speakers** of First Nations languages, or 2.4% of the population who reported to us. People who are considered speakers include both mother tongue speakers and others who have become proficient speakers as adults.
- There are **6,985 semi-speakers**, or 4.98% of the population who reported to us. Semi-speakers are spread throughout the age span with nearly a quarter (21.3%) of semi-speakers under the age of 25. Overall, this is an **increase** since our last report in 2018.
- With speakers and semi-speakers combined, there are **10,355 speakers** of First Nations languages in B.C., or 7.39% of the population that reported to us.
- First Nations language learners make up 12.2% of the total population that reported to us – 17,103 learners. This is an increase of 3,106 learners since 2018.



More Language Learning Opportunities Than Ever

- In the early childhood learning domain, 2,417 children learn their language in 157 early childhood facilities (language nests, Head Start programs and other centres). Of particular note are the language nests, which offer full immersion for at least 15 hours per week. The number of nests has **more than tripled** since our last report. Currently, 380 children at 32 language nests are immersed in their languages for an average of nearly 18 hours per week. Language nests are funded through FPCC's Pathways to Language Vitality Program.



- In the 79 First Nations schools that reported to us, 6,380 students receive an average of 3.07 hours per grade per week of language instruction. Immersion in a language offers the best opportunity to learn; three First Nations schools in the province offer immersion and bilingual education.
- B.C. is home to 139 public schools providing instruction in a First Nations language. **New** since our last report, one public school now offers a bilingual program.
- Adult language learning opportunities have significantly **increased** since our last report: 1,634 adults participate in 95 programs averaging 5.29 hours of learning per week. This includes **full-time adult immersion programs**, which have **increased** since our last report. There were only two full-time programs in 2018, but there are now eight programs in seven different languages. Aside from these 95 programs, many adults are learning their languages independently using FirstVoices or through methods such as FPCC's Mentor-Apprentice Program, which has grown from 27 teams in 2017–18 to 150 teams this year; that's 150 adults immersed in language learning with a mentor!
- The majority of FPCC's programs support adult learners, and there has been an increase of 1,964 learners aged 20–64 since 2018.

- Most important of all, an increasing number of adults are passing the language to the next generation, with many more children learning their First Nations language as their first language in the home. In this report, we are excited to highlight several families who use their languages at home.

The Current Climate for B.C. First Nations Languages

The last four years have been an incredibly tough time to work on language revitalization with so many challenging circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and record wildfires and flooding causing evacuations in many First Nations communities, some of which continue to this day. In spite of these challenges, the work hasn't stopped and there has been remarkable growth with communities adopting new and innovative approaches to language learning.

There were also some unprecedented positive actions taken by provincial and federal governments. This has directly increased the amount of funding FPCC provides to communities for their work and has contributed to the growth observed in this report.

- In 2018, the Province of British Columbia contributed \$50M over three years to support language revitalization.
- The Government of Canada passed the Indigenous Languages Act in 2019. Its subsequent implementation has resulted in higher levels of funding than ever before, approximately \$44M in B.C. between 2019 and 2022.
- Both provincial and federal governments have enacted legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- At a global level, the United Nations celebrated the International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019 and has launched the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, 2022–2032.

With government pledges to provide adequate, sustainable and long-term funding, we are optimistic that the growth observed in this report will continue. At FPCC, we are proud to support First Nations communities in B.C. with their goals to revitalize and maintain their languages well into the future.

"Our language community has grown with people that are committed to language and are building their proficiency. We have additional committed learners in our community who are growing their proficiency and teaching others, especially their families and children. These students went from saying a word here and there to being able to have basic conversations with more proficient speakers and fluent Elders without using English at all!"

— Dawn Foxcroft, Tseshah First Nation, Pathways to Language Vitality Program