

- The health conditions of Aboriginal people continue to improve, largely as a result of better living conditions, increased access to quality health care, and greater community involvement in health education and delivery.
- Over the past two decades, experts have noted a general increase in Aboriginal student attendance and performance. Progress has been particularly noticeable at the post-secondary level, where each year some 23 000 Indian and Inuit students receive education support through a special federal program.
- Since 1989, the federal government has extended financial support to several thousand Aboriginal businesses. In a 1991 survey, more

than 18 000 Aboriginal people indicated that they own or operate a business, many of which are located in Aboriginal communities where they are providing much-needed employment and income to economically depressed areas.

Aboriginal people and the federal government have worked together to achieve these and other improvements. Since 1983, federal spending on Aboriginal programs has more than doubled — despite the Government's overall commitment to fiscal restraint — and is now in excess of \$5.8 billion per year. At the same time, Aboriginal people have increased their control over how this money is spent, and have assumed responsibility for delivering many social and health-care services. For example,

COMPREHENSIVE LAND-CLAIM SETTLEMENTS: MODERN-DAY TREATIES

Although treaty making was widespread and continued in some parts of Canada well into the 1900s, not all Aboriginal groups have signed treaties. This has led to the negotiation of comprehensive land-claim agreements, a process that has been described as a modern form of treaty making.

The negotiation of comprehensive claims is one way in which Canada is building a new partnership with Aboriginal people. Comprehensive claims are based on the assertion of continuing Aboriginal title to lands and natural resources. Comprehensive claims negotiations are intended to result in agreements that define clear, certain and long-lasting rights to lands and resources for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

As of January 1995, 10 comprehensive claim settlement agreements had been signed, most of which are now being implemented (some are awaiting proclamation of legislation). These are:

- the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement with the Cree and Inuit of northern Quebec (1975);
- the Northeastern Quebec Agreement with the Naskapi of northern Quebec (1978);
- the Inuvialuit Final Agreement with the Inuvialuit of the western Arctic (1984);
- the Gwich'in Agreement with the Gwich'in of the western Arctic (1992);
- the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut Agreement with the Inuit of the eastern Arctic (1993);

- agreements with four Yukon First Nations — the Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun and the Teslin Tlingit Council — under the Council for Yukon Indians Umbrella Final Agreement (1993); and

- the Sahtu Dene and Métis Agreement with the Dene and Métis in the Sahtu region of the western Arctic (1994).

Together, the 10 settlement agreements provide 49 000 Aboriginal people with ownership of 560 024 square kilometres of land — an area larger than France. As well, the 10 agreements provide for a total of \$1.786 billion to be transferred to Aboriginal groups that have completed settlement agreements. This money is being used by Aboriginal communities to build an economic base and improve their standard of living. Numerous other rights are provided in the settlement agreements, including wildlife harvesting rights, guaranteed Aboriginal participation in decision-making processes and first option for Aboriginal people on certain economic development opportunities. These rights have the same status and constitutional protection as treaty rights.

Negotiations on 11 additional comprehensive claims are under way. In the province of British Columbia, over 40 Statements of Intent to negotiate have been filed with the British Columbia Treaty Commission by Aboriginal groups representing more than two-thirds of the 196 B.C. First Nations. The Commission is an arms-length, tripartite body (Canada, the Government of British Columbia and First Nations) that has been set up to facilitate the negotiation of treaties in British Columbia. Negotiations are under way with those Aboriginal groups that have been assessed by the Commission as being ready to proceed.