

SUBMISSION TO THE SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE SENATE
AND THE HOUSE OF COMMONS APPOINTED TO EXAMINE
AND CONSIDER THE INDIAN ACT

BY THE HONOURABLE BROOKE CLAXTON, K.C.,

Minister of National Health and Welfare

I. *Distribution of Indians and Eskimos*

1. In order to appreciate all the implications of providing a health service to the Indians and Eskimos of Canada it is necessary to understand something about their numbers, habits and distribution over the whole area of the country. According to the 1944 census there were 125,686 Indians as defined under the Act and about 7,700 Eskimos.

2. Approximately 80,000 Indians live in settled parts of the country, and the remainder are nomadic or semi-nomadic people who live by trapping, hunting and fishing.

3. So far as can be ascertained by available figures the Indian population of Canada was decreasing until about the turn of the century. Since then it has shown an increase which at present has reached an annual rate of about 1,500. Accurate figures for the Eskimo population are not obtainable. However, from the information available it is concluded that they are just about holding their own. Their birth rate is high, but unfortunately, so is the infant mortality rate.

4. All the Eskimos are nomadic. There are no concentrations of population, largely owing to the fact that the food supply available by hunting and fishing is such that they are forced to disperse themselves over practically the whole of Canada's northern territories. The unit of population among Eskimos is the family, whereas among the Indians it is the band. Eskimos are to be found on both shores of the Hudson Straits, on both shores of the Hudson Bay, scattered through the islands of the Eastern Arctic, along the Arctic shore of the District of Mackenzie, and a few are scattered through the inland District of Keewatin. The attached map, Appendix "A", shows the approximate distribution of both Indians and Eskimos. It will be seen that there is hardly any considerable area in Canada where there are neither Indians nor Eskimos and conversely, with the exception of the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, there is no place in Canada where there are more than 5,000 Indians gathered in one community. The intrusion of the white man has resulted in the Indians either withdrawing northward beyond the settled areas or congregating on reserves. In the case of the Eskimos the heaviest concentrations of population are from the mouth of the Mackenzie River along the Arctic Coast to the Coppermine River, on the Eastern shore of Baffin Island, on the south shore of Hudson Straits and the east shore of Hudson Bay.

We prepared a map showing the distribution of the Indians and the Eskimos, because we thought it would enable you to appreciate the nature of the problem with which we were faced in trying to provide health services. It shows graphically where they are located. We prepared this map and there is a description of it attached to the brief; but the photographs, unfortunately, do not show the colours; so I might explain that the red circles show the centres of Indian agencies, with the figures indicating the population; and then, every Indian agency is outlined in black on the map, with the centre of population shown in red, and the Indian population written in black beside that figure.