

## **Cancer in First Nations in Ontario: Risk Factors and Screening – Media Backgrounder**

[\*Cancer in First Nations in Ontario: Risk Factors and Screening\*](#) is a report that was developed jointly by [Cancer Care Ontario](#) and the [Chiefs of Ontario](#). It examines cancer risk factors and screening uptake for both on- and off-reserve First Nations in Ontario and provides essential evidence that can be used by First Nations along with other communities, organizations and groups, to support cancer prevention and screening.

The report shows that First Nations living in Ontario – whether on- or off-reserve – have a much higher prevalence of several cancer risk factors than the non-Aboriginal population, and urgent action is needed to improve health outcomes. Of particular concern is the high prevalence of cigarette smoking and obesity among First Nations, which are the two risk factors associated with the greatest number of cancers.

### **Key Findings: Cancer Risk Factors**

#### **Tobacco**

- In Ontario, more First Nation adults and teens smoke cigarettes than non-Aboriginal adults and teens. Nearly 33 per cent (one-third) of First Nation teens living on-reserve and 14 per cent of First Nations teens living off-reserve are smokers, compared to four per cent of non-Aboriginal teens.
- Smoking rates are greatest among First Nations who are most disadvantaged (as measured by less education). Nearly 60 per cent of First Nation adults who have not completed secondary school (whether living on- or off-reserve) smoke cigarettes, compared to 30 per cent to 40 per cent of those who are post-secondary graduates.

#### **Alcohol**

- First Nation adults living on-reserve are more likely to abstain from drinking alcohol. However, more First Nation adults both drink excessively and smoke. More than 33 per cent (one-third) of First Nation adults living on-reserve abstained from alcohol in the past year compared to fewer than 25 per cent of First Nation adults living off-reserve and non-Aboriginal adults.

#### **Healthy eating, body weight and active living**

- Few First Nation adults living on-reserve eat enough fruits and vegetables. Only 12 per cent of First Nation men living on-reserve and 20 per cent of First Nation women living on-reserve eat fruits and vegetables at least four times a day, compared with 27 per cent of First Nation men living off-reserve and 40 per cent of First Nation women living off-reserve, and 35 per cent of non-Aboriginal men and 52 per cent of non-Aboriginal women.
- First Nations, especially those living on-reserve, are more likely to be obese than non-Aboriginal Ontarians. This is true for every age group, including teens. Nearly half of First Nation adults

living on-reserve are obese, as are 33 per cent of First Nation men living off-reserve and 28 per cent of First Nation women living off-reserve. Among non-Aboriginal adults, 19 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women are obese.

### **Key Findings: Cancer Screening**

- The proportion of women who have had a Pap test in the past three years is the same across on-reserve First Nation women (77 per cent), off-reserve First Nation women (77 per cent) and non-Aboriginal women (78 per cent).
- Only 55 per cent of First nation women living on-reserve ages 50 to 74 have recently had a mammogram, compared to 79 per cent of First Nation women living off-reserve and non-Aboriginal women.

### **Conclusions**

- The data in this report clearly demonstrates that urgent action is needed to improve the health of First Nations in Ontario. Practical actions are required to encourage healthy behaviours, but there is also a need to develop culturally appropriate policies and programs to support individuals, families and communities in making healthy choices.
- The lack of First Nations-specific health data continues to be an ongoing challenge in our attempts to understand and address the risk and burden of chronic diseases including cancer in First Nations. A strategy for increasing the availability of this type of data is required.

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