



Strategic Research La recherche stratégique

Well-Being in Inuit Communities

REVIEW OF TRENDS BETWEEN 1981 AND 2006

Key findings:

- Community Well-being scores improved for Inuit communities between 1981 and 2006.
- This improvement slowed between 1991 and 2001.
- The gap in well-being between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities decreased between 1981 and 2001.
- Since 2001, the well-being gap has widened.

Introduction

Inuit communities are unique. They are located in four regions across Canada's north. The Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories), the Territory of Nunavut, Nunavik (northern Quebec), and Nunatsiavut (Labrador) are known collectively as Inuit Nunangat, which is Inuktitut for the "place where Inuit live". Because each region is different, caution is advised when making comparisons.

The Strategic Research Directorate developed the Community Well-Being Index (CWB) to describe well-being trends in Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities between 1981 and 2006. 'Non-Aboriginal' refers to any community that is neither Inuit nor First Nation. Non-Aboriginal communities include cities that may have First Nation, Inuit or Métis populations.

The CWB

The CWB measures the state of employment, education, income and housing in a community. 'Community' refers to a municipality or an area equivalent to a municipality. CWB scores range from 0 (lowest well-being) to 100 (highest).

The CWB is based on the Census of Population and emphasizes social and economic well-being. It does not consider things such as health, culture or the environment because they are not measured by the Census or any other survey on a consistent basis for all Canadian communities.

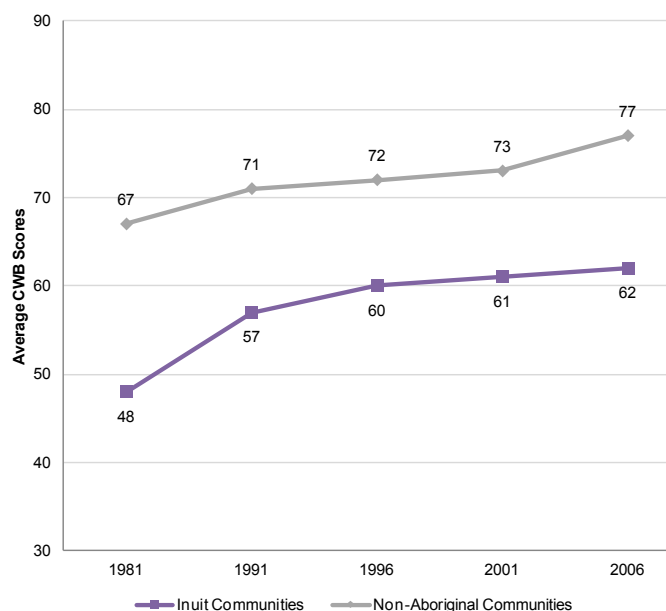
Main Findings

Comparing Inuit, non-Aboriginal CWB scores

On average, CWB scores were 15 points lower for Inuit communities than for non-Aboriginal communities in 2006. Among the "bottom 500" Canadian communities in 2006, 34 were Inuit. No Inuit communities ranked among the "top 500" Canadian communities.

CWB scores improved for both Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities between 1981 and 2006. The CWB gap narrowed slightly between 1981 and 2001 and then grew in 2006. This was due to two factors. First, there was an increase in the average score of non-Aboriginal communities. Second, there was a lack of progress in the average score of Inuit communities during the same period (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Average CWB scores, Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities, 1981–2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006

The trends between 2001 and 2006 should be interpreted with some caution. In non-Aboriginal communities, the score for high school completion increased between 2001 and 2006. This raised their overall CWB score. However, some of this improvement may be a result of adjustments to the education question in the 2006 Census. These adjustments were motivated by changes to the educational profile of the Canadian population and to the education system. Since 2006, the Census measures education in terms of the highest certificate, diploma or degree obtained.

The four individual components of the CWB provided some interesting findings:

- Income in Inuit communities improved from 1981 to 2006. The gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities narrowed. It should be noted, however, that the cost of living in Inuit Nunangat is much higher than it is in southern areas of Canada.
- Education scores for both groups rose between 1981 and 2006. There was no change in the education gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities.
- Housing shows the widest gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities. This is primarily due to housing quality (percentage of houses in need of major repairs), which is poorer in Inuit Nunangat.
- Employment shows the least overall change over time. It also shows the smallest gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities.

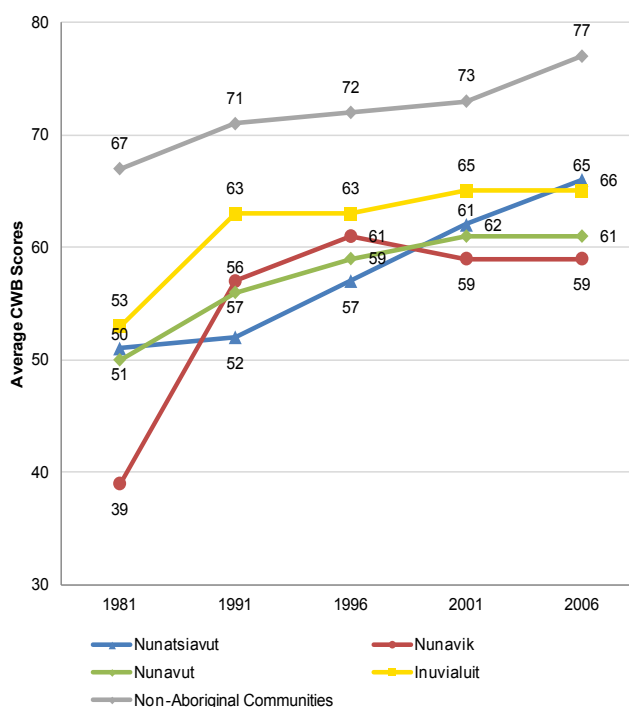
Regional variations in CWB scores

Each of the four regions of Inuit Nunangat is under a different land claim or self-government agreement. Even though CWB scores vary across these regions, there are noticeable patterns. For instance, average scores increased over time in all regions. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in all regions also narrowed. The difference between the lowest regional score (Nunavik) and the highest shrunk by half, from fourteen to seven points (Figure 2).

Even if a majority of Inuit communities' scores improved between 1981 and 2006, they dropped from a 90% improvement rate between 1981 and 1991 to a 60% improvement rate between 2001 and 2006. Although there was some difference in the pace of change, 88% of non-Aboriginal communities saw improvement between 2001 and 2006.

When looking at each region's scores by the components of the CWB, we see a number of different patterns. All regions had gains in terms of income and education. Employment scores typically remained stable. Housing scores showed the most variability. Some regional scores fluctuated from one Census period to another. This was primarily driven by housing quality (i.e., in need of major

Figure 2: Average CWB scores by Region, Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities, 1981-2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006

repairs). Housing quantity (crowding) generally improved over time in all regions.

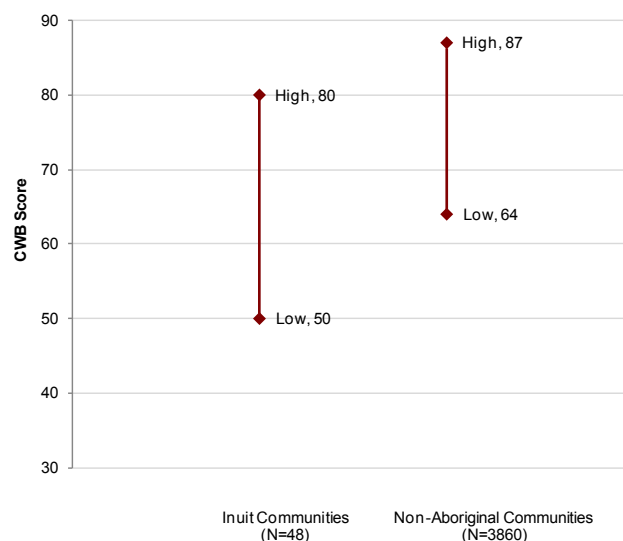
Regional findings must be interpreted with some caution. The small size of these regions may account for some of the variability observed over time. Nunatsiavut and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region contain only five and six communities, respectively.

Variations in CWB among communities

Regional differences are important. But CWB scores also vary widely among individual Inuit communities. In fact, differences in scores are larger among Inuit communities than among non-Aboriginal communities. Some Inuit communities have very low scores, while others have well-being levels close to, or above, the Canadian average.

Overall, 95% of non-Aboriginal communities in 2006 scored within a CWB range of 23 points, from 64 to 87. By comparison, 95% of Inuit communities fell within a range of 30 points, from 50 to 80 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Range of CWB scores, Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities, 2006



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006



Source: Index produced by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada using data from the Census of Population, 2006, Statistics Canada. Data is presented at the census subdivision (CDS) level. Mapping: Natural Resources Canada, National Atlas.

Conclusions

CWB scores improved for both Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities between 1981 and 2006. The improvement for Inuit communities was greatest between 1981 and 1991. The improvement slowed after that, particularly following 2001. The gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities decreased slightly in the earlier part of this period but it widened between 2001 and 2006. The gap between Inuit and non-Aboriginal communities was largest in housing. It was smallest in labour force activity.

About the authors and the study

This research brief is a summary of an article by Chris Penney, Erin O'Sullivan and Sacha Sénécal entitled "The Community Well-Being Index (CWB): Measuring Well-Being in Inuit Communities, 1981-2006." This and other related articles may be obtained through the Departmental Library or at: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100016579>

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About Us

The Strategic Research Directorate is mandated to support the Federal Government's policy making regarding First Nations, Métis, Inuit and northern peoples in Canada. It does this through a program of survey development, policy research and knowledge transfer.

The Strategic Research Directorate Research Brief series is available electronically on the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada website, as well as within the federal community on GCPedia. Print copies are available by special request only.

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