



Strategic Research La recherche stratégique

The Community Well-Being Index

REVIEW OF TRENDS FOR FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES

Key findings:

- Average Community Well-Being score is 20 points lower for First Nation than for non-Aboriginal communities.
- Community Well-Being scores vary across provinces and regions.
- First Nation communities in the Prairie Provinces are at the greatest disadvantage.
- Differences in scores are greater among First Nation communities than among non-Aboriginal communities.

Introduction

First Nation communities are unique, but comparing First Nation and non-Aboriginal communities is helpful to identify trends. If well-being improves in First Nations but not in nearby non-Aboriginal communities, the source of improvement may be in programs, policies and conditions specific to First Nations. If nearby non-Aboriginal communities also improve, the source might be broader social and economic forces.

This research brief reviews trends in the well-being of First Nation and non-Aboriginal communities. Using the Community Well-Being Index (CWB), it looks at the period from 1981 to 2006. Here, non-Aboriginal communities are ones that are not First Nation or Inuit. This includes cities that have First, Nation, Inuit or Métis populations, such as Winnipeg.

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. This includes a First Nation reserve. CWB scores range from 0 (lowest well-being) to 100 (highest).

The CWB is based on the Census of Population. The CWB 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.

Main Findings

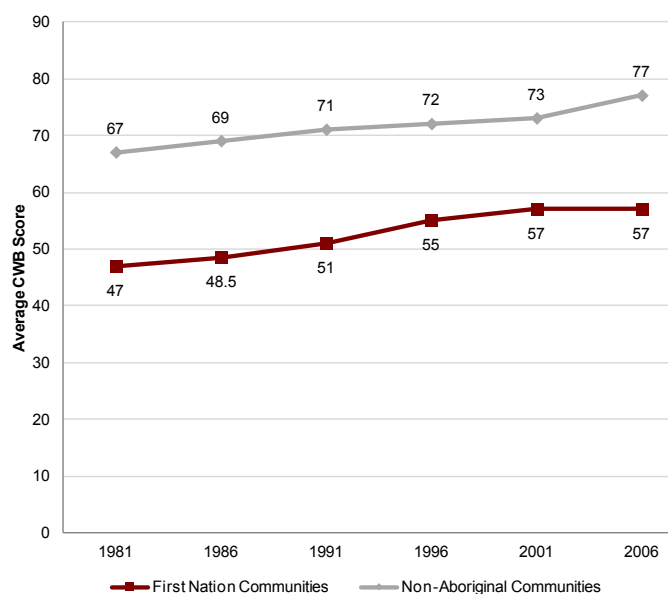
Comparing First Nation, non-Aboriginal CWB scores

On average, CWB scores are 20 points lower for First Nation than for non-Aboriginal communities. Among the “bottom 100” Canadian communities, 96 were First Nations in 2006. At the same time, only one First Nation community ranked among the “top 100” Canadian communities.

Between 1981 and 2006, CWB scores gradually increased in First Nation and non-Aboriginal communities. The pattern shows small improvements in almost all communities. Because both First Nation and non-Aboriginal scores improved, the gap between them decreased less than it might have. The gap narrowed slightly prior to 2001. The gap widened again between 2001 and 2006 (Figure 1).

The trends between 2001 and 2006 should be interpreted with caution. For non-Aboriginal communities, the

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



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006

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.

Looking at the four components of the CWB resulted in some interesting findings. They are:

- Income scores increased at a similar rate for both First Nation and non-Aboriginal communities between 1981 and 2006.
- Education scores also improved in both groups. The improvements for First Nation communities were driven mainly by higher high school completion rates. Increases in the proportion of people graduating from university were smaller.
- Employment scores dropped in both types of communities between 1981 and 1991, but the employment gap between First Nation and non-Aboriginal communities widened. After 1991, employment scores gradually returned to 1981 levels in non-Aboriginal communities. Recovery has been slower in First Nation communities.

- Housing scores show different patterns in First Nation and non-Aboriginal communities. Non-Aboriginal communities have made gradual and steady improvements; improvements in First Nation communities took place mainly between 1981 and 1996. Improvements in housing quantity (crowding) were sometimes offset by declines in quality (in need of major repairs).

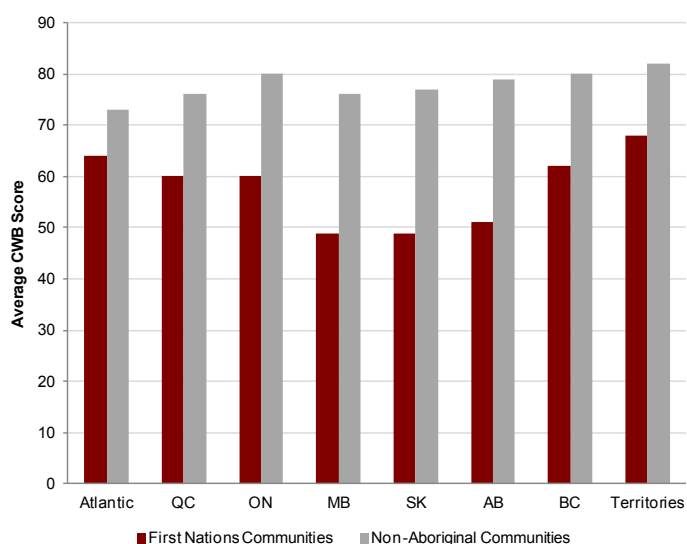
Regional variations in CWB scores

CWB scores vary across provinces and regions. First Nation communities in the Prairie Provinces are at the greatest disadvantage. Prairie First Nation communities have lower CWB scores than First Nation communities located elsewhere in Canada. They also show the largest gaps compared to non-Aboriginal communities. And, because their CWB scores improved more slowly between 1981 and 2006, their position has worsened compared to both other First Nations and non-Aboriginal communities. About 30% of First Nation people live in the Prairie Provinces.

Variations in CWB scores among communities

CWB scores also vary a lot among individual First Nation communities. In fact, scores differ much more among First Nation communities than among non-Aboriginal communities. Some First Nation communities have very low scores. Others have scores close to, or even above, the Canadian average.

Figure 2: Average CWB scores by Region, First Nation and non-Aboriginal communities, 2006



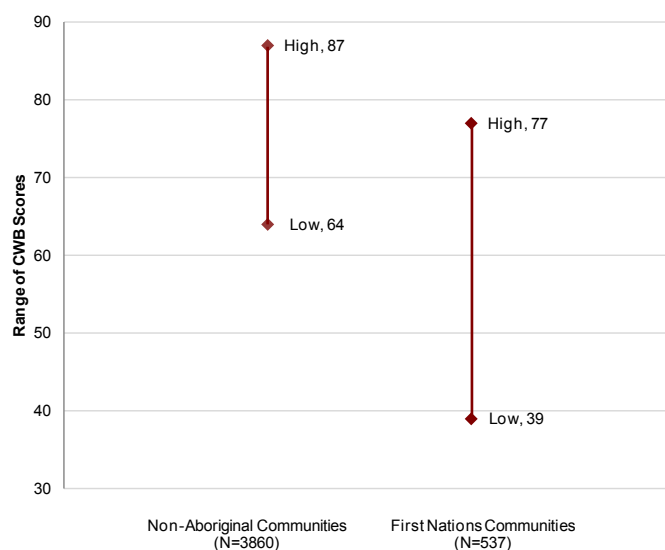
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006

Overall, 95% of non-Aboriginal communities in 2006 scored within a CWB range of 23 points, or from 64 to 87. By comparison, 95% of First Nation communities were spread over a wider range – of 38 points, or from 39 to 77 (Figure 3).

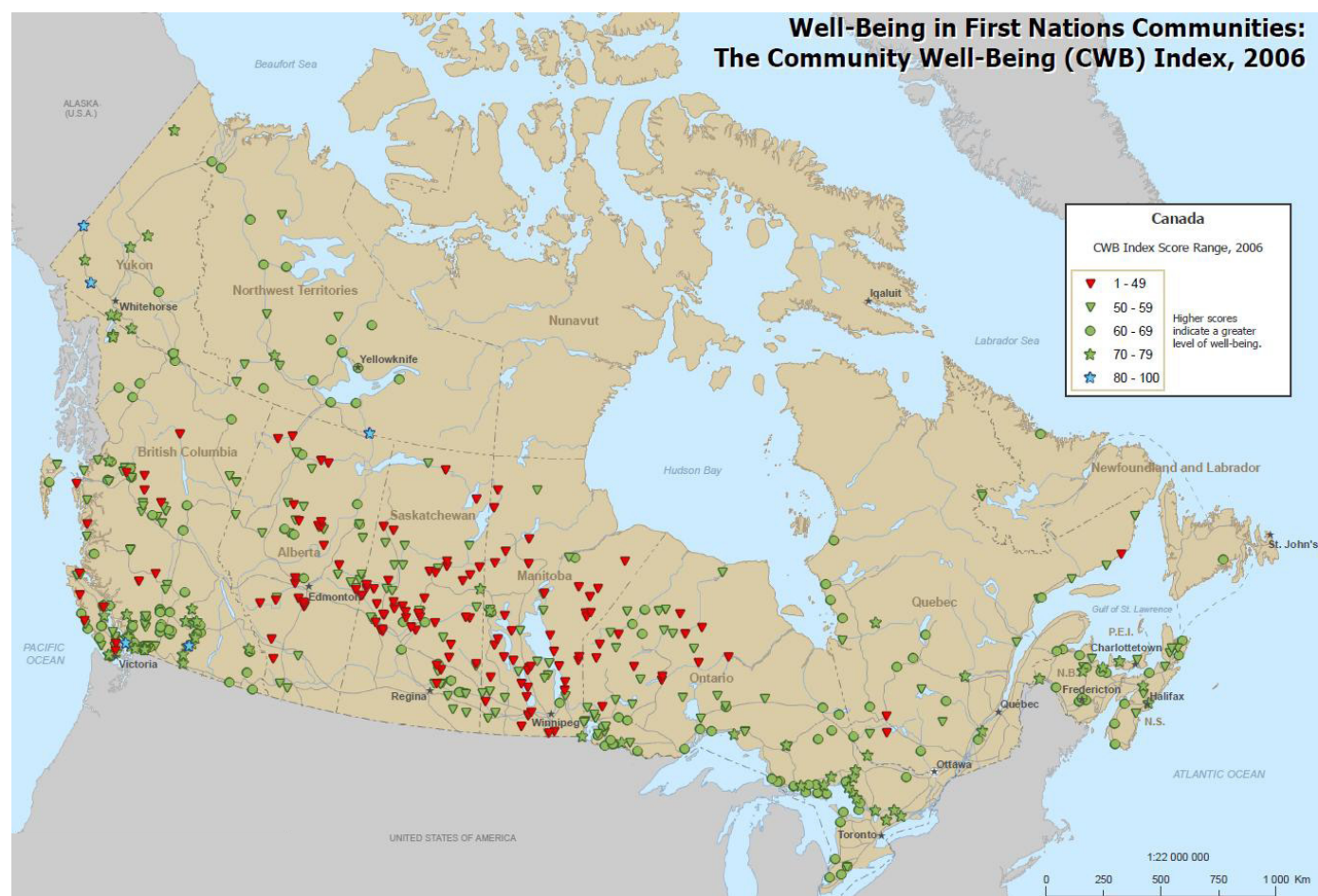
Conclusions

CWB scores improved for both First Nation and non-Aboriginal communities between 1981 and 2006. The improvement for First Nation communities was greatest before 2001. The well-being gap of First Nation compared to non-Aboriginal communities decreased slightly in the earlier part of this period. It then widened between 2001 and 2006. The well-being gap is the largest in the Prairies. This suggests a need to take regional differences into account in policy and program development. Policy and program developers might also take into account differences among First Nation communities.

Figure 3: Range of CWB scores, First Nation 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 (CSD) level. Mapping: Natural Resources Canada, National Atlas.

About the author and study

This research brief is a summary of an article by Erin O'Sullivan entitled "The Community Well-Being Index (CWB): Measuring Well-Being in First Nations and Non-Aboriginal Communities, 1981-2006." This and other related articles can be found at the Departmental Library and at: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100016579>.

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