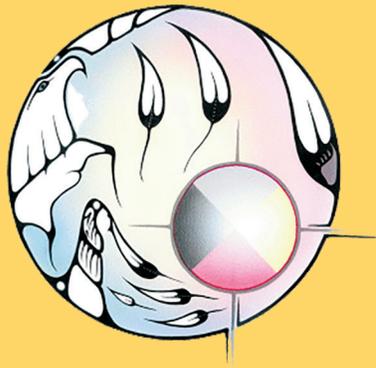


# Ontario Native Literacy Coalition

**Representing the Needs of the  
Largest Indigenous Population  
in Canada with One in every Five  
living in Ontario**



# Acknowledgements

As CEO of ONLC my appreciation goes out to Dr. Rongo H. Wetere, ONZM, FNZIM, who successfully captured our expressed thoughts of the ONLC Board of Directors who review and seek solutions to these challenges that face not only Indigenous people and ONLC but all Ontarians and many organizations.

I wish to thank the many contributors to the research reports reviewed in this study especially Barbara Miller and the funders specifically, The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for this report.

*Nia:wen tahnnon Onen*

**Michelle Davis**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ONLC



**Ontario Native  
Literacy Coalition**

Funding provided by Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MCTU)



Published by Turtle's Back Publishing  
A DIVISION OF THE ONTARIO NATIVE LITERACY COALITION

## **Facing the Facts**

**A major crisis currently exists where declining literacy standards are affecting the lives of all Ontarians and particularly, those from marginalized populations such as, Indigenous and the deaf.**

- Lack of adequate funding of Programs
- Lack of effective program resources and assessment tools
- Lack of Strategic Policy Planning
- Lack of Government core funding commitment
- Lack of accessibility to foundation skill programs
- Lack of services to 40,000 Indigenous people in Ottawa Region by an Indigenous-led organization

### **Supporting Documentation**

1. ONLC Environmental Scan; March 2015
2. Evaluation LBS Program; Cathexis; November 2016
3. More Than Words Can Say; Community Literacy Ontario; September 2018
4. Literacy Lost; CamWest Foundation; December 2018
5. Essential Skills – a Poverty Reduction Strategy; Frontier College; March 2019
6. Indigenous Literacy in Ottawa; ONLC & Rideau-Ottawa Valley Learning Network (ROVLIN); draft; March 2019

**All six informative reports  
paint the same picture:  
We are ready to Act!**

# Stark Realities

Research on Indigenous issues has been going on for decades and yet, Indigenous communities have seen little response despite key findings identified by researchers and practitioners year after year. Optimism has all but vanished. Especially after 20 years of surviving with water advisories warning that the water is not even suitable to bathe in, and 20 years of funding restrictions on Indigenous Post-secondary education students – despite coinciding population growth of over one million people.

These discriminatory examples have many reflecting on 'how come', when an independent contractor from ONLC sent out over 400 surveys by email as part of the LBS Research Evaluation of Service Gaps in 2018, and only 20 replies were received. As well, 133 elected Chiefs of Ontario were contacted and only five (5) chose to reply<sup>1</sup>.

Having engaged in many research projects and environmental scans, we know the Indigenous mindset – a minority response speaks for many.

**We know if we had the resources to deliver quality programs accessible in communities the response from our people would be instantaneous, positive and groundbreaking. Multiple research findings have shown when Indigenous people lift their standard of literacy and education there is no difference in earning power or achievements when compared to non-Indigenous people.**

## Examining the Issue

Deteriorating literacy levels seriously impacts Indigenous people – regarded as being on the bottom step of the ladder of life in a country that has sustained their people for thousands of years and still today on unceded Indigenous Tribal lands of Canada.

Indigenous people have a Treaty Right to education. They have a right to have their own institutions to have access to all that education can provide.

Current practices in LBS programs are considered dysfunctional and needs replacement<sup>2</sup>. ONLC concurs the need for improvement especially in servicing Indigenous people still in recovery mode, in both urban and isolated fly-in communities. For example, in the resource rich 'Ring of Fire' in Northern Ontario it is striking to find an enormous gap in literacy programming when reviewing the map of service locations by ONLC Providers.

---

**A TOTAL GAP**

**NO ONLC PROVIDERS**

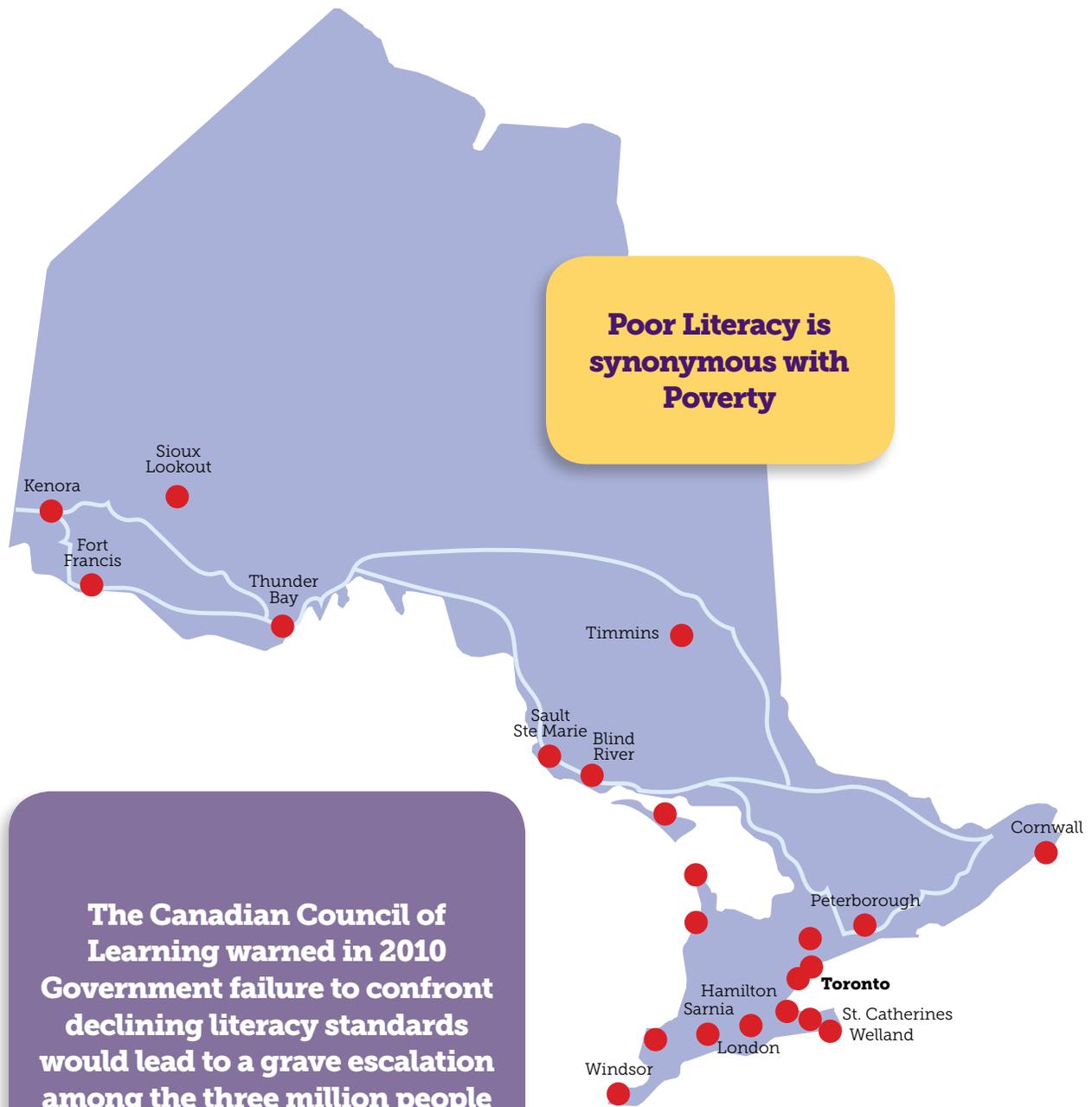
**NO FUNDING**

---

1 Miller, Barbara; ONLC Draft Report; Unpublished; March 2019.

2 Cathexis; Evaluation of LBS Program; November 2016; Executive Summary, pg. 14.

# Ontario Native Literacy Coalition – Current Delivery Sites



**Too many Indigenous people in Ontario have literacy deficits 50% higher than non-Indigenous. Thousands are at Level 1 and 23% live in poverty and are considered as Third World status.**

**‘This is intolerable in a country deemed to be one the wealthiest and generous countries in the world. Census 2016 reported Indigenous incomes across Canada were \$25,526 compared to non-Indigenous at \$34,604.**

It is obvious from the Ontario map that current LBS Programs have minimal effect on improving Ontario’s literacy rates. There has been little attempt made in reaching thousands of Indigenous peoples with low literacy skills.

ONLC serves only 23 communities with funding constraints that prevent expansion required to serve Indigenous people at the highest needs levels.

Research in 2012 by PIAAC estimated LBS Programs were reaching less than 1% of people below Level 3 in Ontario<sup>3</sup>.

The limited sample used in the ONLC unpublished draft research report 2019 showed 97% of those interviewed knew people who wanted to improve their literacy skills. Yet overwhelming numbers of people do not have access to programs.

Support for an Indigenous University in Ontario to provide foundation skills, language and culture and Post-secondary programs was well received in Ottawa. Numerous people and organizations were strongly enthusiastic about the new Indigenous Institute Act for Ontario and the establishment of the Indigenous Advanced Education Skills Council (IAESC).

---

## **Providing Hope for Indigenous People Right Across Canada**

---

### **Literacy Facts**

Examples from numerous international research help identify with the crisis situation that is now experienced in Canada, and particularly Ontario.

- In 2010 Illiteracy costs in the UK was estimated at \$160 billion
- In 2010 literacy costs in the USA was \$240 billion for approximately 44 million people that range from not being able to read a simple story
- Adults with poor Essential Skills experience:
  1. More discrimination
  2. More health problems
  3. Medication errors
  4. More workplace accidents
  5. Lower incomes
  6. Shorter lives
  7. Higher rates of unemployment
  8. Higher incarceration rates

---

<sup>3</sup> Cathexis; Evaluation of LBS Program; November 2016; pg. 3.

In Canada, a similar picture emerges. In the Report *Literacy Lost* by Lane and Murray, 2018 highlight on page two in bold red that “a 1% increase in literacy rates in Canada would transfer into a **\$54 billion gain** annually and every year thereafter.” Frankly speaking, no one seems to believe these stated predictions; if they did all levels of Governments would spend more money on education not less.

## Invest in the Canadian Economy

The many people working in the literacy field are largely underpaid and poorly resourced and yet they are the vital **cog in the wheel** that need support not the billions of dollars projected in spending for infrastructure or higher academic study.

**Alan Galbrith**, a well-known Canadian Economist has stated that while investment in infrastructure, roads and bridges are important; the **investment in literacy skills should come first**.

We know that if Indigenous people reached the same Level as non-Indigenous people this would lift Indigenous incomes by at least **\$9 billion per year** and end the poverty of so many families. Murray is correct that Government needs to invest in people who lack essential skills<sup>4</sup>.

The gains for the Canadian economy would be high as this impacts social, health and justice costs that could be reduced by billions annually. People in the literacy field are forever operating on minimum funds with short-term commitments that have us fighting a losing battle every year. In Ontario, Indigenous, Deaf and Francophone Providers experience this to a much greater degree. Generally most Providers across the country have been prevented from achieving the significant changes we know are necessary.

Inadequate long-term funding for Providers’ to develop adult/family educational programs, matching assessments and resources for delivery in a variety of settings continues to rob our clients/students from what they can and must achieve to compete in today’s modern economy.

What is abundantly clear and has been evident for more than two decades is MTCU funding and programs are ineffective in reducing the gaps in literacy, which continue to grow in alarming numbers.

Government policies have created a humanitarian disaster in Ontario that has wrecked havoc in Indigenous communities who have faced decades of underfunding.

Obviously, poor literacy is a growing problem also for non-Indigenous people who are featured in the millions of Ontarians at the mercy of inadequate skills unable to reach their true potential in life.

## Policies and Programming as Solutions

As the Chief Executive Officer of the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) I believe we need an urgent review of MTCU policies.

It is time to put people first, particularly from Indigenous communities, the fastest growing and untapped population yet to be realized. Their contribution alone can add billions of dollars to the Ontario economy and reduce the burgeoning Social Service, Health and Justice costs.

---

<sup>4</sup> CamWest Foundation; *Literacy Lost*; December, 2018.

ONLC believes it can provide positive recommendations and viable solutions to address this crisis in our Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Ontario.

One example, is the 'Rising Indigenous Justice Department costs.' Indigenous inmates, as it is commonly known, are grossly over-represented in jails across Canada. As reported by the Justice Department, 40% of their total budget of \$10 billion yearly is spent on Indigenous inmates.

It is also significant that 70% of inmates have very poor literacy skills that are not being adequately or effectively addressed before release. ONLC believes that inmates must be provided skills training where they can achieve Level 3 and have their sentences reduced as recognition of that achievement.

Level 3 is the minimum literacy requirement for competing in today's economy and creating opportunities for positive change in people's lives.

However, another growing concern is that many seniors state that they are not financially able to retire and must continue to work. To qualify for most jobs today, requires seniors to be digitally literate. Current policies dictate that LBS services only fund those up to 65 years. ONLC believes if we do not address this scenario, the burden of cost to the Provincial Government will be more than the investment needed to fix it.

## **The Case for Expansion of Services**

The case for an ONLC Literacy Skills Program in the capital city of Ottawa is easily made. Non-Indigenous LBS programs acknowledge they have only a few Indigenous people enroll with them and many drop out and do not complete the program. ONLC has secured an Indigenous Provider who is keen to run the program with facilities available to a group of Indigenous organizations that strengthens opportunities to provide an Indigenous cultural environment that promotes the engagement of Indigenous people.

The 2015 Environmental Scan conducted by ONLC shows that there are many areas in the Province where LBS Programs are not available to Indigenous people, particularly in the far North.

To be frank, Indigenous Adult students at the lowest level of literacy, Level 1, cannot be expected to move to Level 3 with a limited funding allocation of \$2000 per student. This level of funding is barely enough to move one level, let alone three.

Underfunding programs especially in literacy is like pouring water down in a sink. There is no way students can succeed if they are cut off from funding. The growing numbers of Ontarians with inadequate literacy skills is why 48% of Ontarians are below Level 3.

This need not be if adequate funding for programs were accessible in communities not being served. This will pay huge dividends to the provincial economy tenfold on investment.

The National Aboriginal Economic Development Board states that "if barriers were removed to ensure Indigenous people can participate in the economy," then Canada's annual GDP would be increased by \$27.7 billion<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Press; *Canadian Economy Would Get Nearly \$28B Boost if Indigenous People Invited to Participate: Report*; November 22, 2016

# High Literacy Levels = High Salary Expectations

## Level Five

Postgraduate & Professional Studies. \$100,000 and above.  
Annual Earnings, Lifetime Earnings increase with rising literacy levels.

## Level Four

Post-secondary Studies, University, Community College,  
and Tribal Providers.

## Level Three: Post Literacy

Minimum Literacy Level required for modern economy.

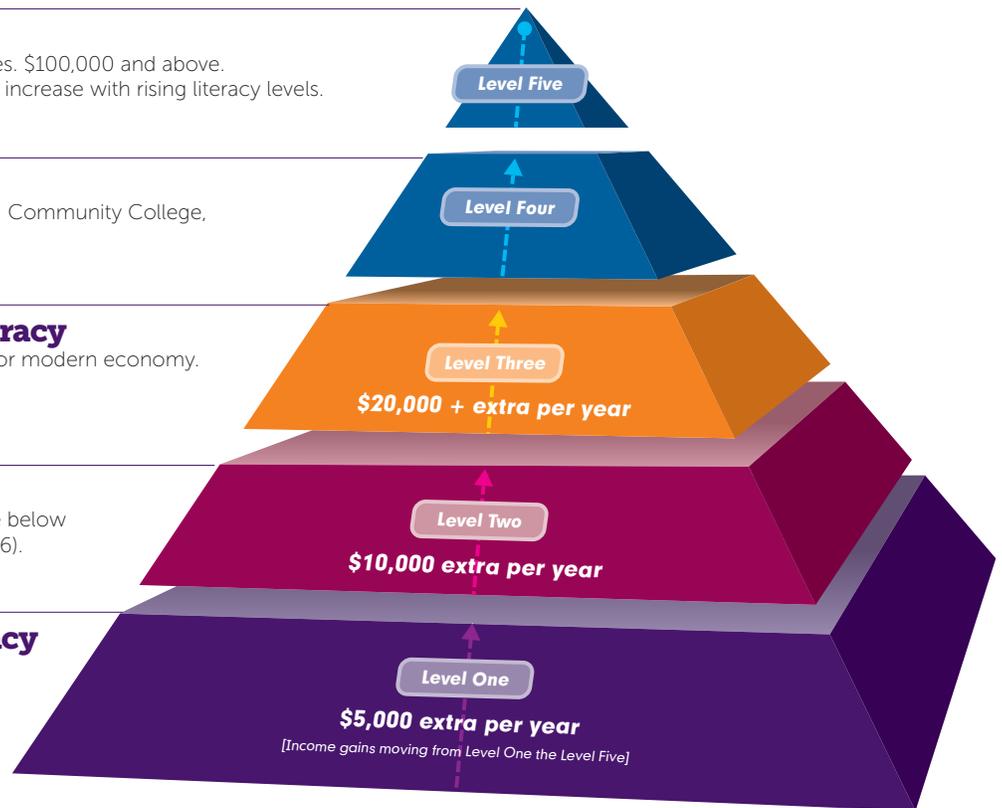
## Level Two: Literacy

48% of working-age Ontarians live below  
Level Three (Statistics Canada, 2016).

## Level One: Low Literacy

60% of Indigenous adults  
are at Level One.

Based on IALSS Levels 1 to 5



ONLC believes that with planned intervention and adequate funding commitments **the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous can close in less than five (5) years.**

**Future funding on economic grounds must target a reduction in high numbers of Ontarians below Level 3.**

# Recommendations

**1**

Literacy and Essential Skills Programs should be made available free and accessible to all people who need to strengthen and diversify their skills to create greater opportunities for employment and further education.

**2**

Literacy and Essential Skills should be recognized as a basic 'Human Right.'

**3**

Increased use of and accreditation options for Indigenous-led programs that have been developed to more effectively engage Indigenous clients/students by embedding cultural education into the curriculum design.

**4**

Accessible and flexible delivery methods must be employed in offering services and programs on Reserve, in rural communities and urban centres.

**5**

Expanding ONLC service coverage into areas in Ontario with a higher Indigenous population that currently have no Indigenous providers or services that offer literacy programs focused on Indigenous way of 'learning and doing.'





Ontario Native Literacy Coalition  
P.O. Box 550  
Ohsweken, ON N0A 1M0  
[www.onlc.ca](http://www.onlc.ca)