High smoking and obesity rates causing increased cancer risk in Ontario Métis

Métis people in Ontario are at an increased risk of developing cancer and other chronic diseases because they are 50% more likely to smoke and nearly 100% more likely to be classified as obese than the general population of Ontario. According to surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006, 28% of Métis adults in Ontario were obese, compared to 15% of the general Ontario population, and 36% of Métis adults were current smokers, compared to 24% of the general population. As the descendants of First Nations women and early European traders, the Métis have maintained a distinct culture and traditions, and they make up approximately one-third of the Canadian Aboriginal population.¹

These trends extend beyond the Ontario Métis to Métis across Canada, as well as to Canada’s two other Aboriginal groups: First Nations and Inuit. When compared to the general Canadian population, many cancer and chronic disease risk factors (e.g., smoking, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, alcohol consumption and obesity) are more common among all three Canadian Aboriginal populations. For example, Canada-wide, smoking rates in First Nations are double those in the general Canadian population,²,³ and Inuit smoking rates are nearly triple those in the general population.⁴

- Métis people in Ontario are 50% more likely to smoke and nearly 100% more likely to be classified as obese than the general population of Ontario.
- Many unhealthy behaviours that contribute to cancer risk are more common among First Nations, Inuit and Métis than they are in the general Canadian population.
- Nationwide, cancer rates appear to be increasing among First Nations, Inuit and Métis.
Although Canadian statistics on cancer trends in Aboriginal populations are limited, it appears that these risk factors are translating into increasing nationwide cancer rates among the Métis, First Nations, and Inuit peoples.

The recently released Aboriginal Cancer Strategy II, available at http://www.cancercare.on.ca/about/programs/aborstrategy/aboriginal, includes six strategic priorities to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer in the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. One of the strategic priorities is prevention with a focus on smoking cessation programs.

References