

Nishnawbe Aski Nation Barriers to ID Analysis

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1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 BIRTH CERTIFICATES

Government-issued identification (ID) is often required to access government services and programs. For example, a health card is needed in order to get healthcare services that are covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP). Birth certificates are a key form of ID, as not only may they be necessary for accessing services or programs but they enable people to procure other forms of ID. When it comes to applying for a social insurance number, a health card, and other forms of ID, a birth certificate is often one of the few documents accepted as part of the application process and in some cases will be the only document an individual can obtain to complete an application.

A significant number of individuals living in remote communities do not have birth certificates, which creates a barrier to access for a variety of government services and programs. This includes many people living in Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) communities. While already facing barriers to services due to the lack of availability of some services within remote communities, the lack of necessary ID creates additional barriers. In some cases, services or administrative support to obtain ID is located outside of the community and other forms of access, such as online access, is restricted.

The costs associated with obtaining a birth certificate may also be prohibitive for some. Despite enabling access to services and programs that can provide valuable benefits, the costs associated with obtaining a birth certificate can deter applications, including when travel is required to apply. As a result, many individuals find themselves without a birth certificate and other appropriate ID, and thus unable to access important services and programs. Registering a birth may be the first step towards obtaining a birth certificate, but there are barriers to birth registration and not all births in remote communities are registered.

Since 2015, the Ministry of Transportation has been delivering driver examination services to remote communities in northern Ontario to help eliminate barriers to accessing driver licensing services, including in NAN communities. The Ministry covers the expenses of sending staff to the communities to deliver these services and ensures driver license cards are received. A similar approach could help address the shortfall in remote communities when it comes to birth certificates and health cards.

1.2 NAN COMMUNITIES

Table 1 lists the registered populations of the 49 NAN communities as of October 2020 and the estimated number of children in each community.¹ Located throughout Northern and Western Ontario, these 49 communities have different levels of access to government services depending on their remoteness.

¹ Registered populations are from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. Estimates for number of children based on registered population in October 2020 and proportion of children recorded in 2016 census. Communities which have no registered populations are not included in the table.

Table 1 NAN communities, registered population, and estimated number of children

Community	Population	# Children	Community	Population	# Children
Aroland	734	322	McDowell Lake	57	21
Attawapiskat	3,679	1,545	Mishkeegogamang	1,992	989
Bearskin Lake	941	358	Missanabie Cree	525	192
Brunswick House	864	356	Moose Cree	4,851	1,741
Cat Lake	827	373	Muskrat Dam Lake	474	208
Chapleau Cree	542	198	Neskantaga	493	168
Chapleau Ojibway	40	15	Nibinamik	540	242
Constance Lake	1,783	680	North Caribou Lake	1,212	534
Deer Lake	1,364	623	North Spirit Lake	493	221
Eabametoong	2,752	1,349	Pikangikum	3,138	1,149
Flying Post	247	90	Poplar Hill	691	364
Fort Albany	2,208	1,020	Sachigo Lake	970	452
Fort Severn	723	281	Sandy Lake	3,165	1,445
Ginoogaming	990	401	Slate Falls	295	128
Kasabonika Lake	1,200	522	Taykwa Tagamou Nation	635	247
Kashechewan	3,048	1,408	Wahgoshig	380	131
Kee-Way-Win	827	384	Wapekeka	512	239
Kingfisher Lake	628	264	Wawakapewin	73	27
Lac Seul	3,588	1,417	Webequie	944	442
Long Lake No. 58	1,684	722	Weenusk	605	186
Marten Falls	819	393	Wunnumin	705	314
Matachewan	911	228			
Mattagami	597	189	Total	53,746	22,578

1.3 INITIAL OUTREACH

Between February 2019 and February 2020, NAN Corporate Services conducted outreach and assisted with applications for birth certificates, birth registrations, delayed birth registrations, and health card applications in 10 communities. Data collected about the type and number of applications completed provides an initial data set (included in Appendix) with information about the ID shortfall in these communities. This data sheds light on the ID shortfall in these communities but does not reveal the full extent of the shortfall, as these initial efforts did not reach all those needing ID. Based on this data, we can provide an estimate of the total number of individuals in NAN communities without appropriate ID, though this estimate should be seen as underestimating the number of individuals without appropriate ID.

1.4 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this analysis is to estimate the number of NAN members without appropriate ID and the estimated cost to communities for the applications needed to address this shortfall. In addition, we

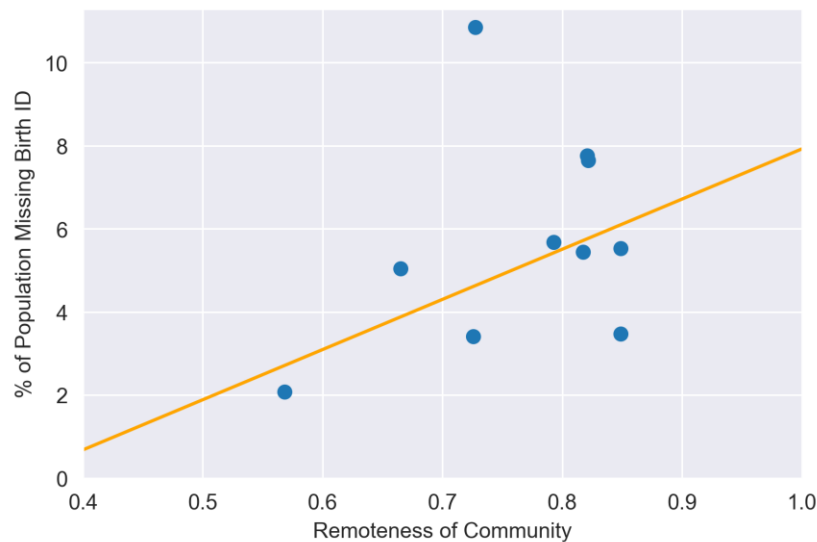
examine the additional benefits that members of these communities could receive were they equipped with appropriate ID.

2.0 RESULTS

2.1 NUMBER OF PEOPLE MISSING DOCUMENTATION

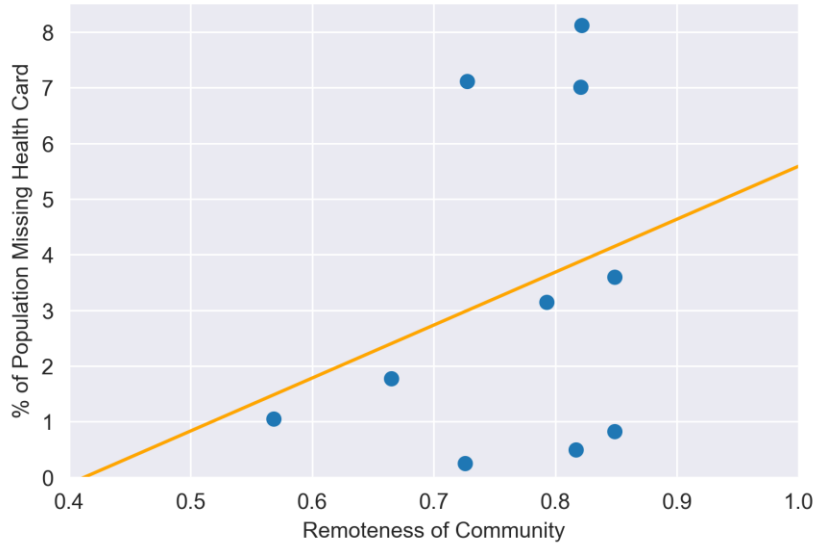
The 10 communities where NAN Corporate Services conducted outreach represent a variety of remoteness, as measured using Statistics Canada’s Remoteness Index.² Examining the relationship between the share of people missing documentation in a community and a community’s remoteness provides a quantitative measure to help in estimating the number of people who may be missing documentation in other communities. Figure 1 shows this relationship for each of the 10 communities (the blue dots) for birth ID, along with a line of best fit. Figure 2 shows this relationship for each of the 10 communities for health cards, along with a line of best fit.

Figure 1 Correlation between remoteness and the fraction of the population missing birth ID (a larger remoteness value means that the community is farther from and less connected to larger population centers)



² Statistics Canada. [Table 17-10-0143-01 Index of Remoteness, 2016](#)

Figure 2 Correlation between remoteness and the fraction of the population missing health cards (a larger remoteness value means that the community is farther from and less connected to larger population centers)



While the correlations are not particularly strong, in part due to the small sample size, they do reflect the trend that more remote communities have a larger share of the population missing ID.³ This trend may be due to a number of different factors, including access to government offices and the fees associated with the applications.

Table 2 shows the estimated number of people missing birth certificates or health cards in remaining NAN communities. These estimates are based on the existing data about missing ID from 10 communities, the population of a community, the remoteness of the community, and the correlations resulting from the analysis shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Given that the existing data from 10 communities provides only a lower end estimate of the shortfall in those communities, the resulting estimates are conservative. The estimated number of missing birth certificates in unvisited NAN communities is 1,939, while the estimated number of missing health cards is 1,250.

³ The correlations are: 0.61 for birth certificates and 0.29 for health cards.

Table 2 Estimated number of people missing birth certificates or health cards in NAN communities not yet visited

Community	Birth Certificates	Health Cards	Community	Birth Certificates	Health Cards
Attawapiskat	267	186	Missanabie Cree	0	0
Brunswick House	21	11	Moose Cree	127	68
Chapleau Cree	13	7	Muskrat Dam Lake	27	18
Chapleau Ojibway	1	1	Neskantaga	17	10
Constance Lake	44	23	Nibinamik	31	21
Deer Lake	80	54	North Spirit Lake	29	20
Flying Post	5	2	Pikangikum	180	122
Fort Albany	154	107	Poplar Hill	40	27
Ginoogaming	26	14	Sachigo Lake	57	39
Kasabonika Lake	69	47	Sandy Lake	182	123
Kashechewan	213	148	Taykwa Tagamou Nation	9	3
Kee-Way-Win	48	33	Wahgoshig	4	1
Lac Seul	101	56	Wapekeka	30	20
Long Lake No. 58	42	22	Wawakapewin	5	3
Marten Falls	24	13	Webequie	27	15
Matachewan	12	3	Wunnumin	41	27
Mattagami	10	4			
McDowell Lake	3	2	Total	1,939	1,250

While the community outreach did identify some members requiring a delayed birth registration, the data was insufficient to extrapolate to all NAN communities. Additional data collection on this issue would be required.

2.2 COSTS OF APPLICATIONS

For most purposes, a standard birth certificate is sufficient for application to government programs. The fee for a standard birth certificate is \$25.⁴ If a birth certificate had been issued previously, the replacement fee is \$35. Certified birth certificates, which are required for Indian Status applications, cost an additional \$10. Additional fees may also apply for faster service.

Registering a birth can also initiate the process of obtaining a birth certificate, and can be done at no cost up to a year following birth. However, lack of access to internet can make the registration process difficult, particularly after the first month, at which point online registration may be the only free option. If the registration of a birth occurs more than 12 months after the birth date, a fee of \$50 may apply.⁵

At the lower end of the cost spectrum, if only standard birth certificates are required, the total cost of applications required to make up the shortfall of birth certificates in unvisited NAN communities would be \$42,000. At the upper end, if replacement certified birth certificates are required along with the fees

⁴ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/get-or-replace-ontario-birth-certificate> ; Retrieved December 2020

⁵ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/register-birth-new-baby#section-2> ; Retrieved December 2020

for delayed birth registrations, the total cost would \$71,000. In practice, it is likely that the cost of applications required to make up the existing shortfall would fall somewhere between these limits.

Application fees represent only one possible barrier to access and one possible cost associated with an application. Many people without birth certificates may not have access to the services required to complete the application. For example, if a person does not have access to a credit card or personal cheques, additional costs may be associated with obtaining a money order to mail with the application, while submitting applications in person can involve significant travel and associated costs. Even when there is no application fee, as with a health card, there may be costs associated with obtaining the ID for those living in remote communities.

2.3 VALUE OF BENEFITS

The Canada Child Benefit (CCB) provides a tax-free monthly payment to families to help raise children under the age of 18. In 2020, the maximum benefit that a family could receive is \$6,765 per year for each child under 6, and \$5,708 per year for each child aged 6 to 17. Additional income (based on the previous year) beyond \$31,711 acts to reduce the benefits received.

However, in order to be eligible for the child benefit, proper documentation must be provided. In Ontario, application for CCB is integrated into the birth registration process. Therefore, if the births of new children are not registered, families cannot receive the benefits. For children without birth certificates born before the introduction of CCB, or without enrollment in CCB with birth registration, a current birth certificate is required to gain access to the benefits. While the age distribution of the community members who were missing birth certificates was not recorded, a conservative estimate of the number of children missing birth certificates in a community would be in proportion to the fraction of the community which are children. For example, if 30% of a given community are children, then 30% of the people missing birth certificates could be assumed to children.

Of these children, if just half are eligible for an annual benefit of \$5,000, it would result in over \$2.1 million of additional tax-free annual income to families with children in these communities. If more children are eligible, or the average benefit larger, the additional income to families could be significantly larger.

Birth certificates, meanwhile, allow access to services and benefits including healthcare, via obtaining a health card.

2.4 COST TO GOVERNMENT

Since 2015, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation has provided on-site access to driver license examinations and registration in remote fly-in communities. Typical costs for each visit to a fly-in community range from \$18,000 to \$25,000.⁶

⁶ Correspondence between Ministry and NAN.

If a similar program were undertaken to provide access to obtain birth certificates and registrations, the total cost to the Ontario government to visit each of the remaining 34 NAN communities with a registered population would, assuming an average cost of \$20,000 per community, be \$680,000.⁷ Therefore, the total cost to the Ontario government to provide access to obtain necessary ID would be at most \$750,000, if the Ontario government covered both the community visits and cost of registrations. In return, these communities could gain access to over \$2.1 million in federal child benefits, as well as access to health care and other social services.

It is also important to note that the child benefits received by members of the community would be ongoing, while the cost to give access to all community members would largely be a one-time cost. However, specific communities may need to be visited in the future if a significant number of births remain unregistered.

⁷ In practice, the required amount could be less since not all NAN communities are fly-in only.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

After NAN's initial visit to 10 communities, it is estimated that there could be over 1,900 people in the remaining NAN communities without birth certificates and over 1,200 people lacking health cards. The minimum direct cost to apply for birth certificates to make up this shortfall would be \$42,000, though it could be 70% greater if birth certificates are certified replacements rather than original requests and delayed birth registration fees apply. There may also be additional costs associated with the application process for birth certificates and health cards (which on their own carry no application fee). Furthermore, it is likely that these figures underestimate the actual ID shortfall.

Birth certificates are a key form of ID accepted as part of the application for health cards, which are needed in order to access the many healthcare services that are covered by OHIP but are otherwise costly.

It is estimated that providing birth certificates for children currently without them could result in up to \$2.1 million annually in benefits to NAN families through the Canada Child Benefit. This is nearly three times the estimated \$750,000 that it would cost government to visit each of the remaining communities and complete the needed applications.

A. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Table 3 shows the number of applications completed for different ID in different NAN communities by NAN Corporate Services between February 2019 and February 2020.

Table 3 Initial ID Applications, February 2019 - February 2020

Community	Date	Number of Birth Certificate Applications completed	Number of Birth Registrations completed	Number of Delayed Birth Registrations completed	Number of Health Card Applications Completed	Total Applications in the Community
Cat lake First Nation	February 25,2019-Februraury 27, 2019	39	3	5	26	73
Weenusk/Peawanuck First Nation	March 6,2019	19	0	2	5	26
North Caribou Lake First Nation	April 24, 2019-April 26, 2019	58	1	7	6	72
Aroland First Nation	May 28, 2019 - May 29, 2019	34	1	2	13	50
Eabametoong Fort Hope First Nation	July 29, 2019-July 30, 2019	53	4	0	29	86
Slate Falls First Nation	August 27-28 2019	29	2	1	21	53
Fort Severn First Nation	September 13, 2019	37	1	2	26	66
Kingfisher Lake First Nation	September 17, 2019-September 18,2019	44	3	1	51	99
Mishkeegogamang First Nation	October 22, 2019-October 23, 2019	49	4	15	5	73
Bearskin Lake First Nation	February 24, 2020-February 25, 2020	67	3	3	66	139
TOTAL:		429	22	38	248	737