



# Towards Health Equity for Inuit

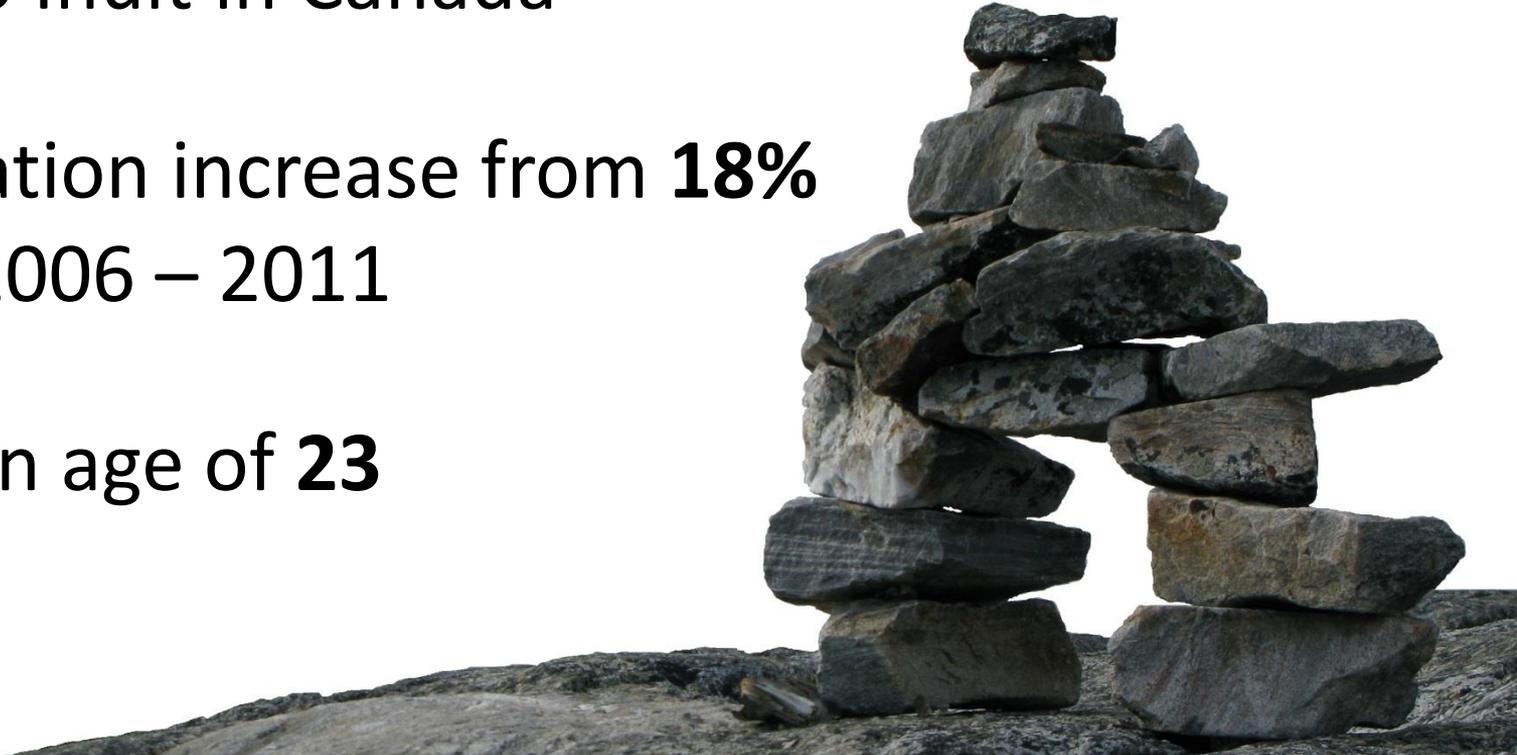
*Creating a health system that supports  
Inuit-specific approaches*



# Inuit Population

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- **60,000** Inuit in Canada
- Population increase from **18%** from 2006 – 2011
- Median age of **23**



# Inuit Nunangat (Homeland)

- The majority of Inuit live in Inuit Nunangat
- **53** Inuit communities in Canada
- **Four** Inuit Land Claim Regions
  - Inuvialuit Settlement Region
  - Nunavut
  - Nunavik
  - Nunatsiavut



# Inuit Culture

- Strong culture and language
- A foundational connection to the land, sea, and ice
- Holistic view of the relationships between all living and non-living things
- Strong family and social networks



# Inuit Communities

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- Remote coastal communities
- Many communities created in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Most Inuit communities lack adequate infrastructure such as roads, ports, Internet, health facilities, education facilities, and housing
- Can only be reached by air and sea



# Inuit Societal Changes

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- Dramatic socio-cultural changes have occurred in the past 60 years
- Forced relocation and adoption of southern values altered Inuit society
- Imposition of residential schools led to inter-generational trauma that continues to affect health & well-being



# ITK History

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- Established in 1971 as Inuit Tapirisat of Canada
- Has played an active role in settling four Inuit land claims:
  - James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement
  - Inuvialuit Final Agreement
  - Nunavut Land Claims Agreement
  - Nunatsiavut Land Claims Agreement



# ITK Today

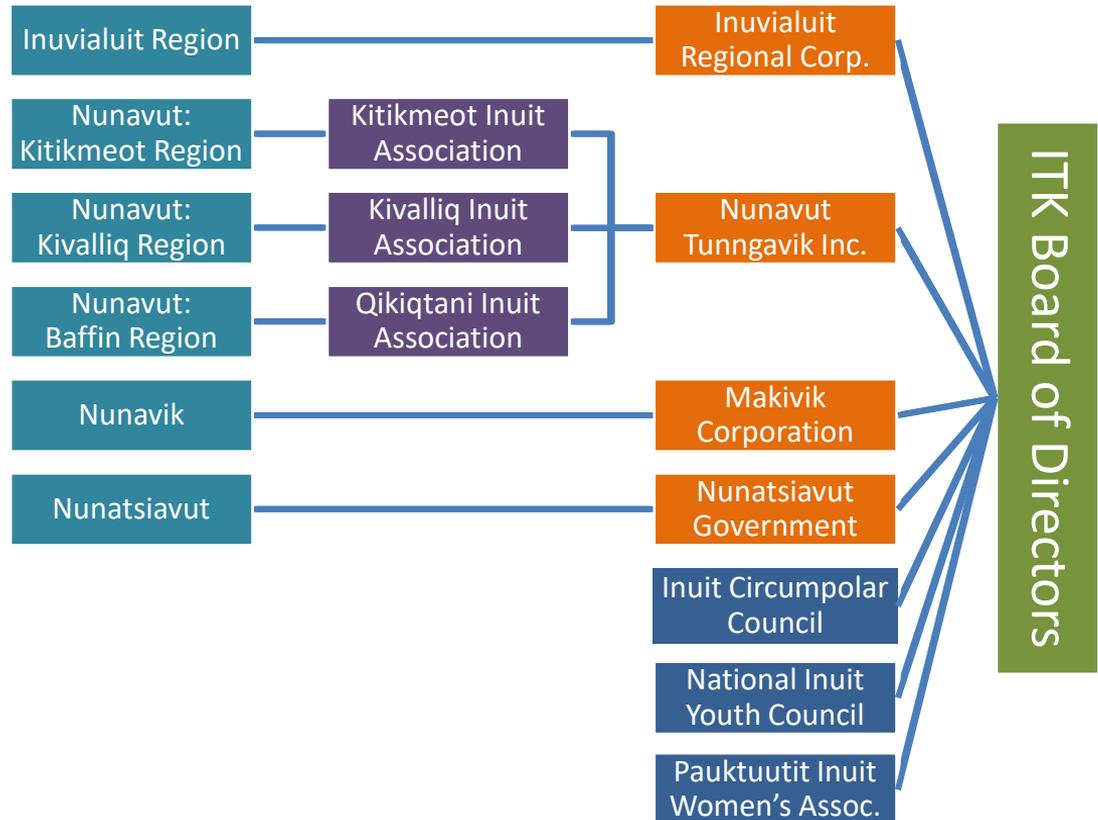
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- In 2001 became Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK)
- National organization for Inuit in Canada
- Democratically elected governance model with all Canadian Inuit at its base
- The counterpoint for the Government of Canada for national-level interactions with Inuit



# Inuit Governance Process

## LEGEND



# Department of Health and Social Development



# Inuit Health Challenges

- Lower life expectancy
- Higher rates of infant mortality
- Disproportionately higher rates of infectious diseases
- Highest suicide rates of any group in Canada

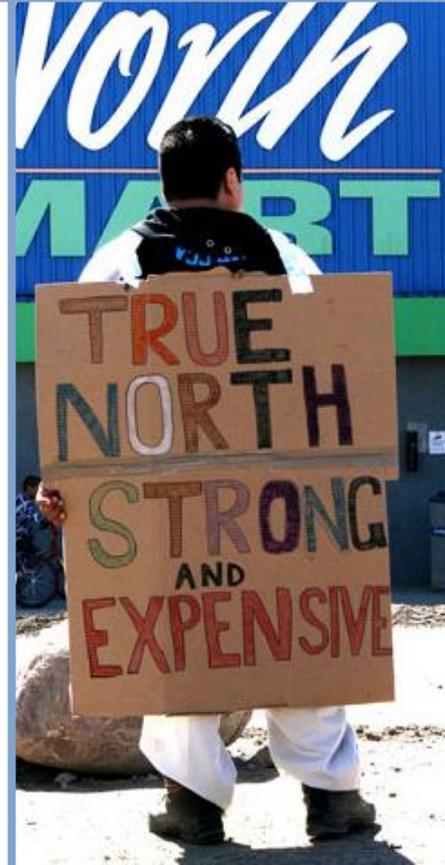


Photo Credit: David Murphy

# Social and Economic Inequities

## Inuit Nunangat

**39%** of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded homes<sup>1</sup>

**29%** of Inuit aged 25 to 64 in Inuit Nunangat have earned a high school diploma<sup>1</sup>

**70%** of Inuit households in Nunavut do not have enough to eat<sup>2</sup>

**\$17,778** the median individual income for Inuit in Inuit Nunangat<sup>4</sup>

**30** the number of physicians per 100,000 population in Nunavut<sup>5</sup>

**45.6%** of Inuit in Inuit Nunangat are employed<sup>1</sup>

**70.8** the average life expectancy for residents of Inuit Nunangat\*<sup>6</sup>



## All Canadians

**4%** of non-Indigenous people in Inuit Nunangat live in crowded homes<sup>1</sup>

**85%** of all Canadians aged 25 to 64 have earned a high school diploma<sup>1</sup>

**8.3%** of all households in Canada do not have enough to eat<sup>3</sup>

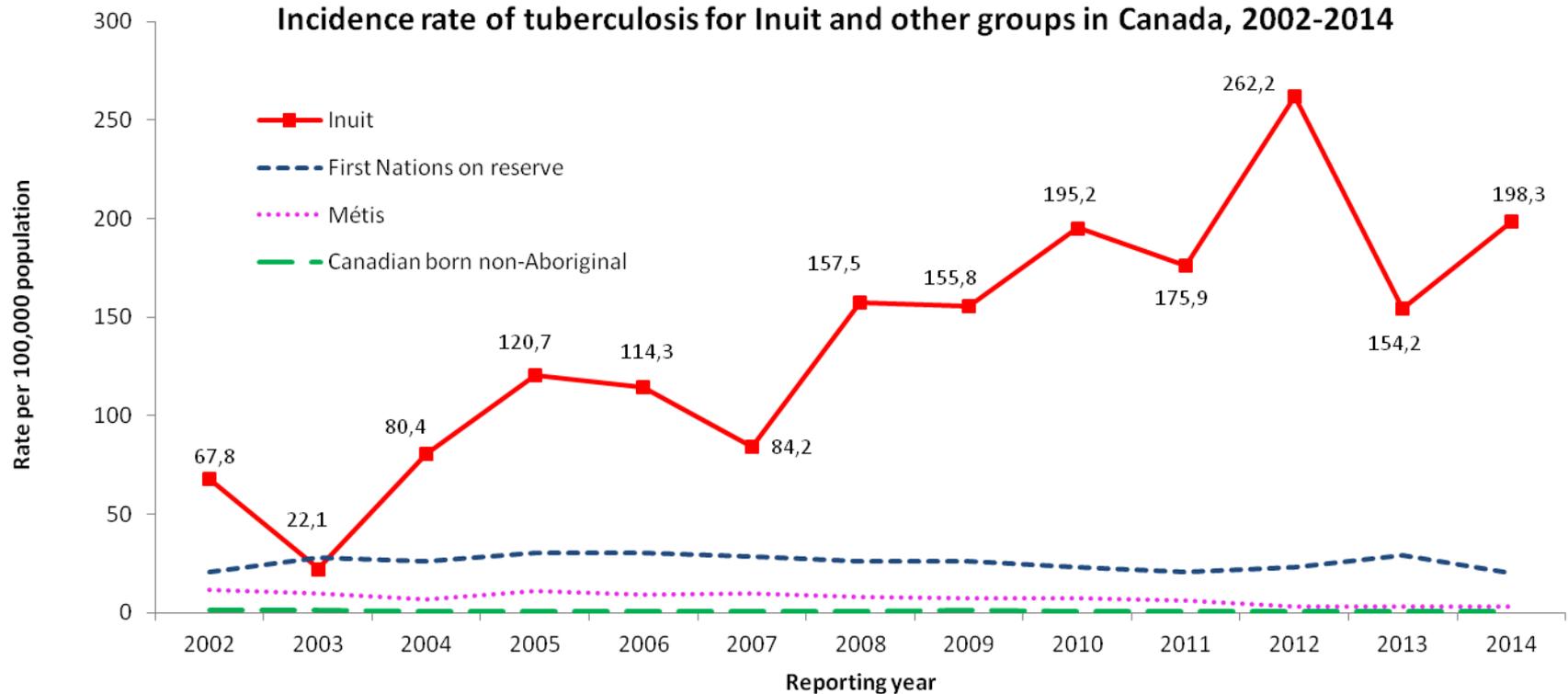
**\$77,683** the median individual income for non-Indigenous people in Inuit Nunangat<sup>4</sup>

**119** the mean number of physicians per 100,000 population in Urban Health Authorities<sup>5</sup>

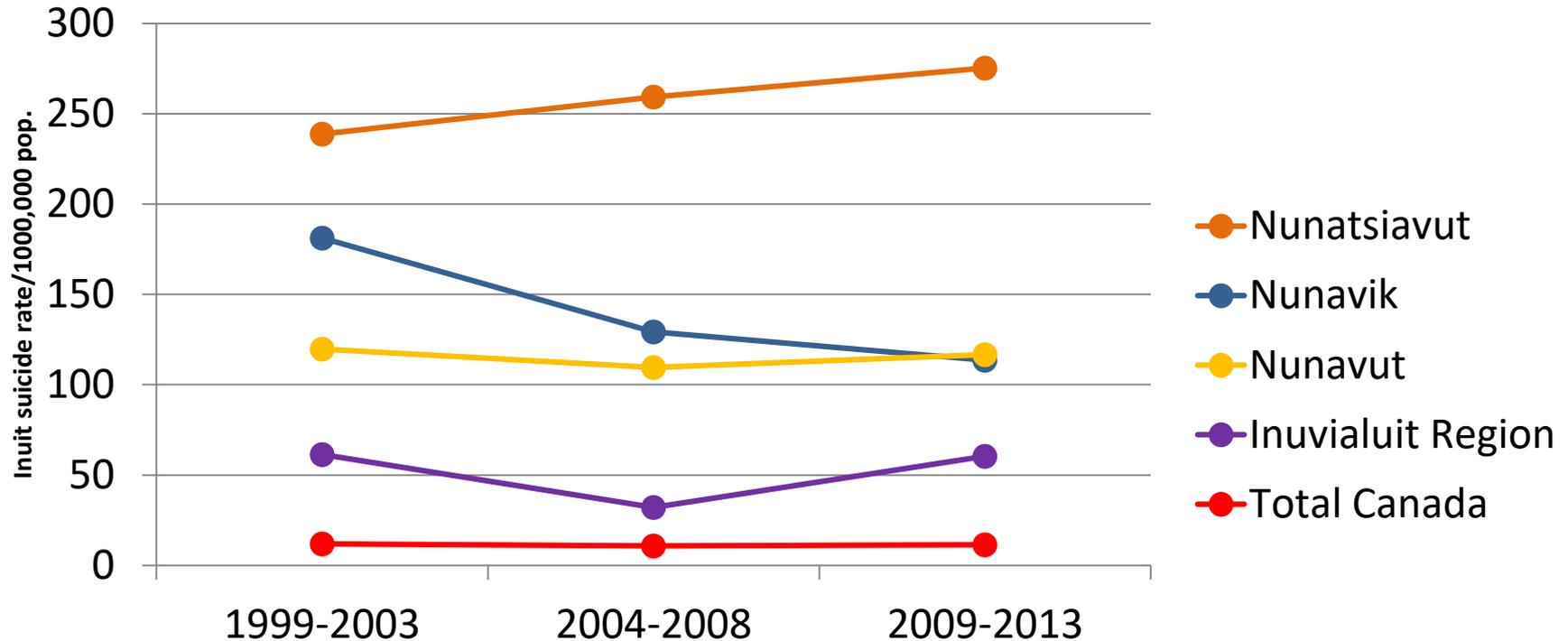
**60.9%** of all Canadians are employed<sup>1</sup>

**80.6** the average life expectancy for all Canadians<sup>6</sup>

# Tuberculosis Rates



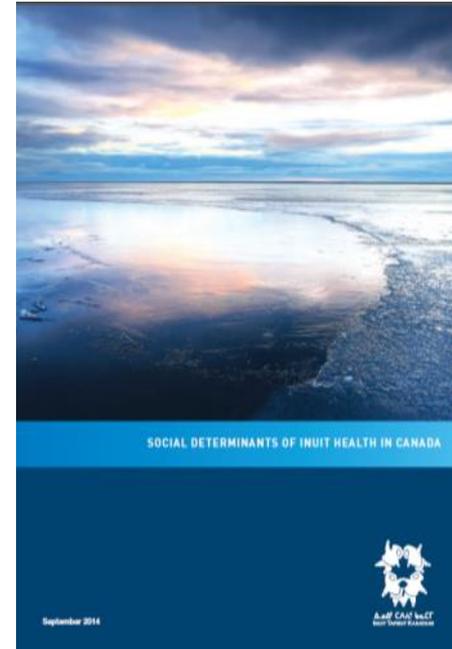
# Suicide Among Inuit by Region



Information from: National Inuit Suicide Prevention Strategy

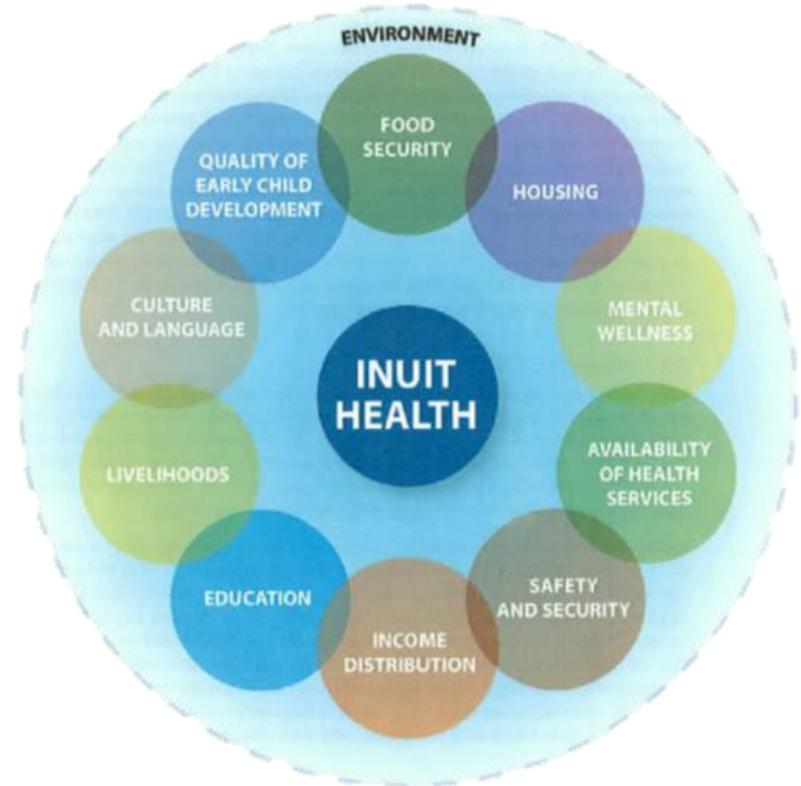
# Social Determinants of Health

- Conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, play, and age, including the health system
- Shaped by distribution of money, power, and resources at global, national, and local levels
- Determinants are highly interconnected



# Social Determinants of Inuit Health

- Food security
- Housing
- Mental Wellness
- Availability of health services
- Safety and security
- Income distribution
- Education
- Livelihoods
- Culture and language
- Quality of early child development



# Mental Wellness

- Physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellness as well as strong cultural identity
  - Historical and intergenerational trauma
  - Socio-economic conditions and employment opportunities
  - Access to continuum of culturally relevant mental wellness, medical, and social services
- Nunatsiavut Department of Health and Social Development in 2012 offered a 12-week Inuit Intergenerational Trauma and Addictions Healing Program

Rates of Inuit youth suicide are

**11X**

the Canadian national average

# Quality of Early Childhood Development

- Maternal, fetal, infant, and children's health and wellness
  - Nutrition and food security
  - Environments for healthier pregnancy
  - Access to appropriate and culturally relevant health care services
  - Inuit early childhood development programs
- A multidisciplinary Regional FASD Diagnostic Team in Nunatsiavut – example of Inuit-specific programming that supports early identification of children at risk through FASD screening

The most crucial period of life is between **0-6** years of age. Creates the foundation for lifelong optimum growth, development, health and wellness



# Culture and Language

- Unique culture and language
  - Intergenerational trauma associated with the legacy of residential schools
  - Inuit youth participating in cultural activities such as on-the-land camps
  - Inuit language as the primary language of instruction in schools
- In Nunatsiavut, culture and language programs have been developed for youth including Cultural Days to highlight the uniqueness of Inuit culture

83%

of Inuit in Inuit  
Nunangat can  
converse in  
Inuktitut

# Livelihoods

- A range of social factors beyond employment including all ways in which families are generating income and supporting themselves
  - Employment opportunities
  - Participation in traditional practices
  - Consumption and sharing of country foods
- Harvester Support Programs such as the Atugaksiat Program in Nunavut, which provides financial assistance to harvesters for hunting equipment and sewing supplies

75%

of Inuit households share their country food with others in their community



# Food Security

- When people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life
- High levels of food insecurity through the regions
  - Barriers to harvesting and consuming country foods
  - High cost, quality and availability of store-bought food
- “Feeding My Family” has been successful at showing the high cost of food in the North

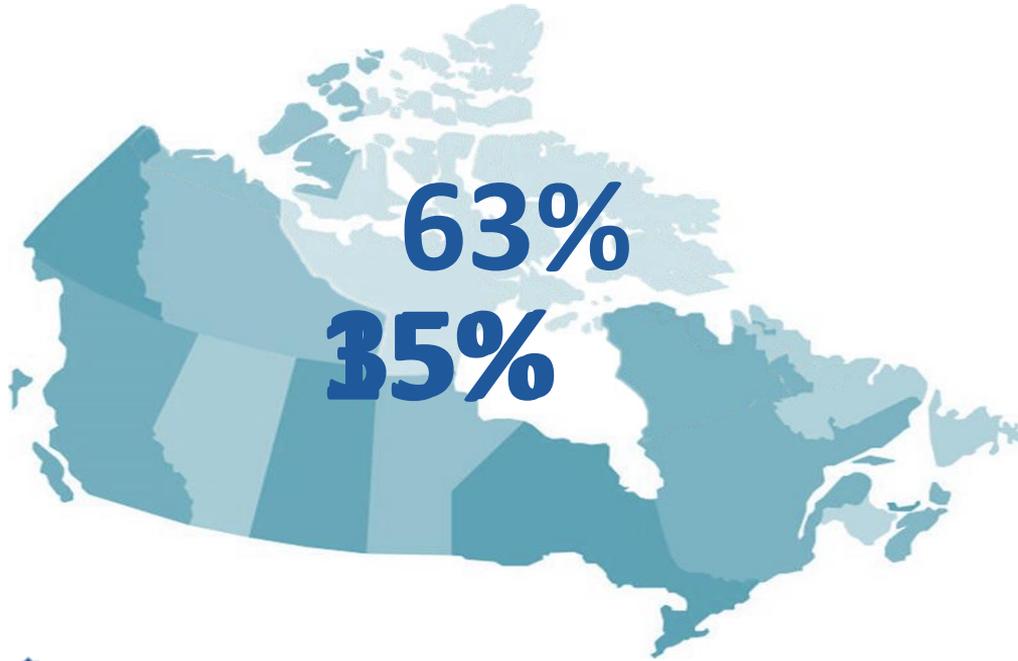
A family of four in  
Nunavut will  
spend

**\$395 -  
\$460/week**

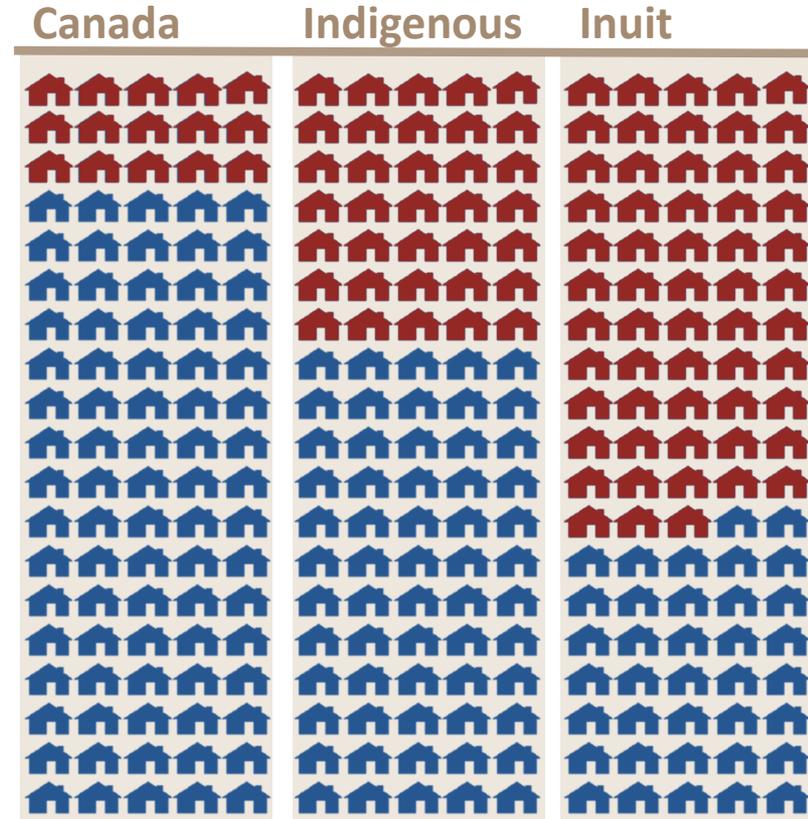
to buy a basic  
nutritious diet

# Food Security

## *Food Insecurity Crisis in Inuit Nunangat*



-  Represents 1% of food secure households
-  Represents 1% of food insecure households



# Housing

- Housing Crisis in Inuit Nunangat:
  - Housing shortage
  - Crowded homes
  - Homes in need of major repairs
  - Poor ventilation
- Inuit Housing Forum (October 2016) led to Inuit-specific recommendations toward the development of the National Housing Strategy
- ITK will work with Canada on the development of an Inuit specific housing strategy as part of the National Housing Strategy

Inuit are

**8X**

more likely than  
non-Indigenous  
Canadians to live  
in crowded homes



# Housing

## *The Challenge of Overcrowding*

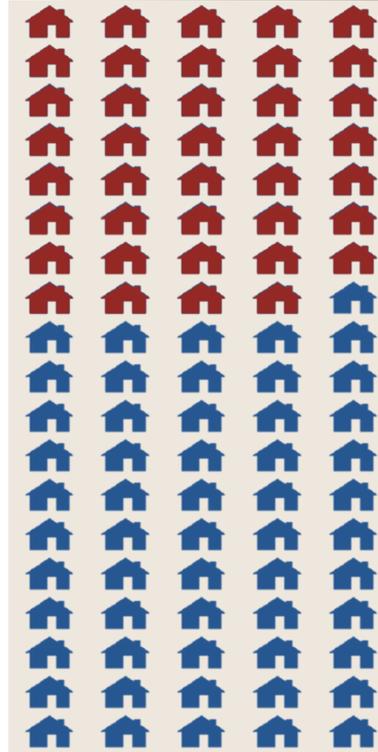


 Represents 1% of households  
 Represents 1% of overcrowded households

### Canada



### Inuit Nunangat



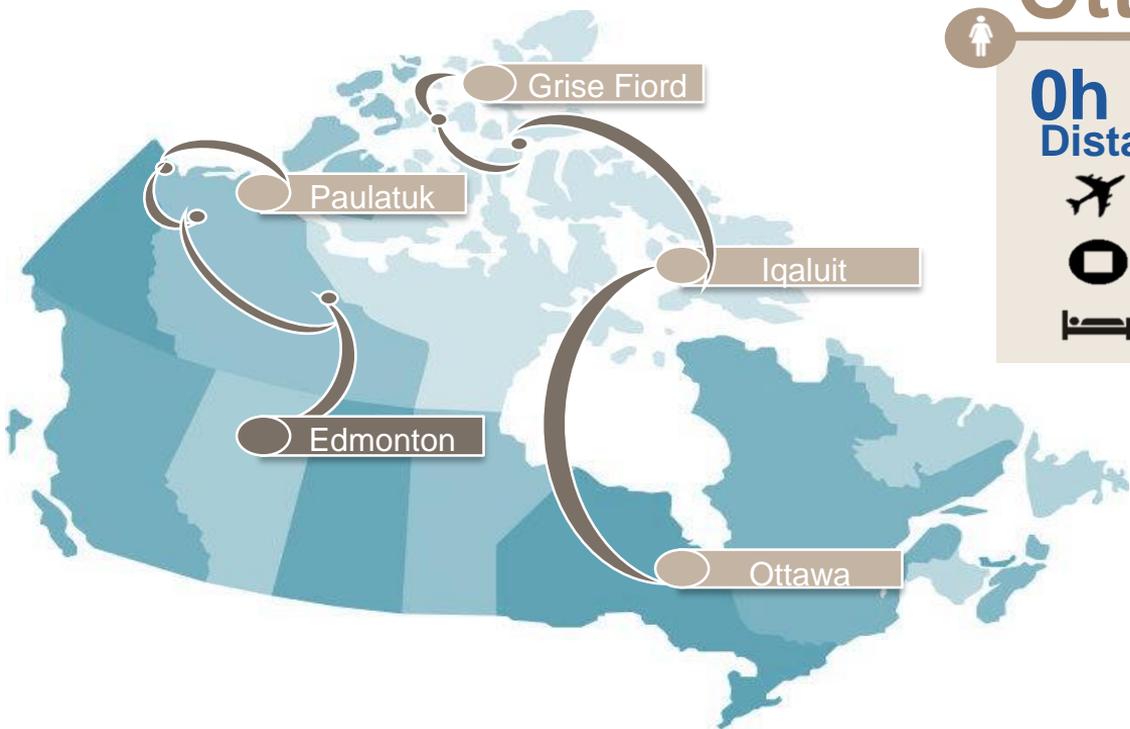
# Availability of Health Services

- Access to culturally-appropriate, high quality health services
  - Need to leave communities for medical care
  - Inuit values, approaches, and perspectives
  - High turnover/shortages of health care professionals
- Nunavut Arctic College offers a nursing program with Inuit graduates in partnership with Dalhousie University

**56%**

of Inuit adults had contact with a medical doctor in the previous year compared to **79%** of the total Canadian population

# A Patient's Journey



## Ottawa



**0h 14 min**  
Distance: 6 km



0 flights



0 stops



0 overnights

## Paulatuk



**29h 0 min**  
Distance: 1,869 km



2 flights



4 stops



1 overnight

## Grise Fiord



**29h 22 min**  
Distance: 3,481 km



3 flights



4 stops



1 overnight

# Table Breakout Discussions

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Please join one of our table breakout discussions to learn more!

- Food Security
- Housing
- Early Childhood Development
- Education and Training
- Mental Wellness
- Culture and Language



# A Path Forward

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- Existing evidence to inform new Inuit-specific programs or interventions
- Inuit willingness to work with governments through partnership
- Show Canada what is possible through a common vision on shared health priorities



# A Path Forward

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- Inuit-specific approaches
- Address the root causes
- Sustainable investment
- Collaboration – We need to work together





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INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI

Nakummek  
Quana

Qujannamiik  
Nakurmiik

Thank you  
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