



## Introduction

Indigenous peoples have a long history of service in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), notwithstanding the power dynamics of settler colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Historically, Indigenous individuals joined the Canadian military despite at times facing discrimination related to their identity.<sup>2</sup> The program had a positive impact on the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous participants and created a meaningful connection between communities and the CAF.<sup>3</sup> Since the establishment of Bold Eagle, the CAF has developed additional programs for Indigenous peoples and initiatives that incorporate cultural components. These programs and initiatives have created opportunities for employment and leadership for Indigenous individuals that contribute to the

Canada has a fast-growing Indigenous population of about two million, comprising three main groups recognized under the Canadian Constitution: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. These groups are diverse and constitute more than 600 Indigenous communities speaking over 70 Indigenous languages. Indigenous peoples represent about 5% of Canada's multicultural population of over 41 million.<sup>4</sup> For Indigenous peoples, serving in the military means facing many challenges including cultural adaptation, language barriers, and travelling from remote communities. While Indigenous



In this policy brief, the focus will be on CAF programs for Indigenous peoples along with related CAF Indigenous initiatives.

The analysis suggests that Indigenous programs and initiatives have a dual purpose of increasing Indigenous participation in the military and promoting national reconciliation, although challenges remain. The authors acknowledge being Caucasian female scholars of immigrant background with an interest in diversity in military organisations including the

Established in 1997, this program provides a concise, intensive introduction to the military environment, facilitating informed career decisions. In three weeks, participants become familiar with military life, including exercises similar to Basic Training and realistic military experiences. The CAFIEP does not include scheduled Indigenous cultural activities and teachings; however, civilian Indigenous counsellors, who may also be recognized as elders by their communities, are available to provide culturally appropriate support to participants during and after the program such as smudging or sharing circles, as needed. Participants can either train at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, in Quebec, or at Canadian Forces Base Halifax, in Nova Scotia. Participants are not enlisted in the CAF, rather, they are enrolled as civilians as this is considered a “try before you buy” program. Costs associated with travelling to and from the program

necessary resources,<sup>17</sup> the CAF data on Indigenous programs since 2008 show that they have consistently attracted Indigenous peoples to the military.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it remains unclear how many Indigenous individuals join the military without participating in these programs.

During the consultations, some expressed concerns that recruiters may be funnelling

fostering leadership and healing, promoting a cohesive society that can repair relations

In Canada, the journey towards reconciliation and building renewed relationships with Indigenous peoples began in 1998 sparked by a report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples including a chapter on the Indian residential schools. In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to investigate the history and document the personal stories of survivors of the residential schools and, in 2015, it

relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country.”<sup>24</sup> To advance reconciliation and redress the legacy of residential schools, the TRC issued 94 calls to action addressing the federal, provincial, and territorial governments of Canada and the wider Canadian society.<sup>25</sup> The calls to action include improved education, health, and employment opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

Our consultations revealed that some Indigenous peoples see the military as an institution that can promote their interests and positive relations in Canadian society in line with national reconciliation goals. Several participants pointed to the history and success of the

falling under the EEA in 2002. Bold Eagle was created in 1989 as a local initiative between the Prince Albert Grand Council (then the Prince Albert Tribal Council) in Sc in Synal etAin 200waMC /P <Lang (en



Recommendations

Our research points to the following recommendations that will position the CAF to further promote reconciliation, as well as improve Indigenous attraction, recruitment, and representation in the CAF.

While the various programs have many strengths, the consultations also revealed some challenges including the fact that it was uncovered that they are not all as well run as Bold Eagle, which should represent the standard for other programs to follow. For example, a graduate of the Grey Wolf who did not appear to have completed any meaningful Indigenous cultures and awareness training. The program was subsequently paused for a few years until it was revamped. Additionally, the RCAF should also consider developing its own summer program to create a path for Indigenous peoples to join the Air Force, considering that it has the lowest Indigenous representation among the three services namely 2.6%, compared to 3.2% in the Army and 3.0% in the Navy.33 In our consultations, we found that the objectives of the ILOY program are unclear and contested between academic faculty who are more concerned about academic standards. In an attempt to bring some clarity, in May 2024, the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) the Training Authority responsible for ILOY, issued the ILOY mission statement emphasizing the program’s goals of fostering leadership and personal growth in a challenging and... opportunity to serve Canada in a leadership role, potentially through employment in the CAF.34 To date, the new ILOY mission statement is not published on the CAF... approved. Furthermore, it was mentioned that ILOY students would prefer to be better... more freedom to select courses based on their interests and academic background. ... individual learning plans. We were informed that in the future, ILOY students will be ... credit. CAFIEP is a recruitment tool for Indigenous peoples considering a career in the CAF.35 However, through our consultations. we discovered that it is not a very attractive program for Indigenous candidates. Removing the stipend to attend CAFIEP ... drop in enrolments. Participants in our consultations also noted that the time of year when CAFIEP takes place, in May and October, clashes with both school attendance ... men in particular to attend, especially if unpaid. We also consulted with someone who joined the CAF through CAFIEP who said that they did not have access to Indigenous elders and were not made aware of the DIAG. We recommend identifying options to compensate or reward CAFIEP participants, regardless of if after graduation they

and incorporating scheduled cultural events by Indigenous elders or counsellors rather than on an “as needed” basis.

Our research found that recruiters’ training in Indigenous programs are mentioned in their training, familiarising with them is left to recruiters’ discretion. Due to the short duration of their postings (2-3 years), many recruiters do not invest the necessary time in this area. This gap may be partially addressed in future by a recently launched in-person course called “Indigenous Cultural Orientation” which will be compulsory for recruiters involved with Indigenous applicants and communities. The objectives of the course include interacting with Indigenous peoples, describing DND/CAF initiatives concerning Indigenous people, and incorporating Indigenous considerations in recruitment processes. These findings have to be assessed in due time.



implementation. Additionally, events organised by Indigenous elders and advisors tend to be ignored by non-Indigenous personnel, and often Indigenous members themselves cannot attend because of very busy schedules. We recommend that the CAF should: provide Indigenous cultural and spiritual support across CAF Bases and Wings; have Indigenous cultural awareness tailored to senior leaders; strengthen mechanisms to report discrimination against Indigenous members; and integrate Indigenous knowledge in military education programs.

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