

# INUIT IN NUNAVIK AND NUNATSIAVUT HAVE A LIFE EXPECTANCY 10 YEARS SHORTER THAN MOST CANADIANS

SCIENCE BRIEF



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Policies must be developed and adopted to address the current significant health inequality and lower life expectancy.*
- *Promotion of a healthy lifestyle must be encouraged; the negative impacts of drugs and alcohol cannot be ignored.*
- *Promotion of health and nutrition education in communities is also crucial.*
- *Research-driven interventions, such as those that were successful in the Inuit regions, must be pursued. For example: the study leading to the ban on trans-fats in Nunavik, the research that disclosed the substantial decline in persistent organic pollutants both in the environment and in people, and the research that revealed that marine fatty-acids provide protection against CVDs (Cardio Vascular Diseases).*
- *An active lifestyle must be promoted to enhance quality of life.*

Nunavik and Nunatsiavut have the shortest life expectancy of the four Inuit regions and one that is substantially lower than the rest of Canada. Young males and older females are particularly vulnerable to premature death. Mortality profiles differ by sex with intentional and non-intentional injuries weighing most heavily for men and chronic diseases for women. Environmental changes together with changes in the socio-economic environment are contributing to this problem through negative impacts on human health and well-being. Recent health indicator data including food and nutrition, CVD (Cardio-Vascular Disease) risk factors, contaminants, infectious diseases from animals or drinking water, and injuries through travel, indicate that the people of Nunavik and Nunatsiavut are among the least healthy in the country with the situation apparently declining.

While significant declines in mean blood concentrations of mercury, lead and cadmium have been observed in Nunavik between 1992 and 2004, a significant proportion of individuals, particularly women of childbearing age, continue to have concentrations exceeding the acceptable level set by Health Canada. State-of-the-art research is identifying deleterious effects on the development of young Inuit with initial findings indicating long-lasting adverse effects of early contaminant exposure on cognitive functions. However, positive effects of fatty acids on sensory and memory function have been identified.

Obesity and cardiovascular disease levels are high and rising. However, for the same level of risk factors, Inuit are in better health than Caucasian populations. The consumption of marine fatty acids, the beneficial effects of which appear to be multiplying, is one of perhaps several protective factors that seem to be at play. However, these factors may be at risk due to dietary transition, environmental changes and the availability of quality country food.

This document should be cited as:

Dewailly, E. and Owens, S. 2012. Health Surveys and Beyond: Nunavik and Nunatsiavut – Science brief. In Allard, M. and M. Lemay (eds.) Nunavik and Nunatsiavut: From science to policy. An Integrated Regional Impact Study (IRIS) of climate change and modernization. ArcticNet Inc., Quebec City, Canada.