

October 10, 2008

Stats show Nunavik residents not doing well

Social conditions “surprising and shocking”

JANE GEORGE

KUUJJUAQ - Nunavik has achieved progress in several areas over the past 20 years, but many challenges remain, Gérard Duhaime, a Laval university researcher, told the recent meeting of Kativik Regional Government councilors in Kuujjuaq.

Duhaime said some of findings from the Nunavik 2008 socio-economic profile are "very surprising and shocking."

The profile includes a series of simple graphs showing how Nunavik compares to Quebec with respect to its basic statistics on population, education, workforce, jobs, housing and health.

These show Nunavik's population has doubled since 1986, there are more high school students and the number of full-time jobs has increased dramatically. The Inuit language remains strong.

But life expectancy has fallen, tobacco-related deaths are up, housing is overcrowded and levels of violence are still high.

And housing is more overcrowded in Nunavik than in other Inuit regions in the Canadian Arctic, with one in three households living in overcrowded conditions, Duhaime said.

The region's housing is also much more in need of repairs than housing in the rest of Quebec.

Duhaime said overall Nunavik presents a "very, very different" profile than Quebec, due to its high birth rate, which is more than two times higher, and its lower life expectancy, which about 20 years less.

A baby born in southern Quebec today can expect to live about 80 years, but a baby born in Nunavik today can expect to live only about 62 years, down four years from 1991.

The profile also found:

- The proportion of Nunavimmiut aged 15 and over who attend school is similar to that in Quebec, but the final level of schooling obtained is lower;

- Physicians, nurses, hospital beds and child care places are all more numerous in Nunavik than in Quebec;
- Hospital admissions are higher in Nunavik than in Quebec;
- Deaths due to smoking, daily tobacco use and heavy alcohol consumption are higher in Nunavik than in Quebec;
- Crime and family violence are higher in Nunavik than in Quebec.

The statistics can help the leaders of the future Nunavik government make wise decisions on where to put money, Duhaime said.

But some of the KRG councillors criticized the statistics, saying that the 2006 figures were already out of date.

Philip Inish, the Naskapi chief of Kawawachikamach, who holds an ex-officio seat on the KRG council, said more Inuit should be involved in the collection of statistics.

The profile is a result of the Nunivaat Nunavik statistics program, which grew from a 2004 agreement with Laval to provide updated statistics and research reports. Nunivaat now has a online database of information at <http://www.nunivaat.org>.

The KRG councilors approved extending the agreement with Laval to continue work on Nunivaat at a cost of \$439,000 until the end of 2010.