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Nunavik stats program launches new regional snapshot

But statistical coverage of the region is in decline, warns researcher

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KUUJJUAQ — Did you know that 99 per cent of Nunavik Inuit can converse in Inuktitut?

Or that the leading cause of death in the region is cancer, closely followed by suicide?

Those statistics and more are included in a new pocket-sized snapshot of the region, called Nunavik in Figures 2015, produced by the region's Nunivaat Statistics Program and released this week.

It offers a concise portrait of Nunavik's socio-economic portrait — population, employment, education income and health care — designed for easy reference in Inuktitut, French and English.

It draws from Nunivaat's impressive made-at-home [databank](#), launched in 2005 and available to the public.

But the new publication is also designed to make a point: that statistics are a valuable and vital part of informing policy to respond to the region's needs.

“This is a very good tool, and it will be helpful for all the organizations to use,” Kativik Regional Government chair Maggie Emudluk told council meetings Sept. 15. “Because no one is going to help us, we need to help ourselves.”

But the book's author, Nunivaat program director Gerard Duhaime, used the opportunity to stress just how important statistics are to a region like Nunavik, where he says statistical coverage of the region is worse than ever.

“We all believe in the weight of statistics in order to improve the life of people in the region,” Duhaime said.

“The statistical data for the region is degrading, due to changes in the census.”

He's referring to the 2010 decision by the Conservative government to eliminate the mandatory long-form census and replace it with a voluntary household survey.

Duhaime, a Laval university economist, says the “vast majority” of data used by his team is gathered through Statistics Canada; even Quebec's own statistics agency uses StatsCan to compile much of its data.

Since those changes were made, the federal agency no longer compiles data specifically for Nunavik.

“We have no choice but to ask Statistics Canada to make special compilations of the data, at a cost,” Duhaime said.

“For example, if you want to know the population of Nunavik, you can’t simply add up the population from each village, because those numbers are founded.”

Statistics Canada also took income and education levels out of the 2011 census, opting to ask those questions in a separate survey.

“The result is that you don’t have the same base,” Duhaime said.

And in the long-term, it means policy makers have less access to information on the social conditions and health status in Nunavik and many other remote areas of the country.

Duhaime encourages Nunavimmiut to put pressure on the new federal government to recognize the value of data on regions like Nunavik.

At the same time, he urges everyone in Nunavik to take part in local surveys, where regional organizations or researchers like his team gather their own data.

He points to the current [cost-of-living survey](#) taking place, to track the spending habits of Nunavimmiut in six communities.

The results of that research will inform future cost-of-living subsidies directed to the region.

“The participation in this survey has been great,” he said. “And all this information we’re gathering in our own surveys is something that doesn’t exist otherwise.”

You can see a pdf of Nunavik in Figures 2015 [here](#).