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UNGAVA TULATTAVIK HEALTH CENTER
CENTRE DE SANTÉ TULATTAVIK DE L'UNGAVA

FACT SHEET 3 – COLONIAL HISTORY IN NUNAVIK

Understanding the Past to Better Understand the Present

Cultural Safety Team
Reference Guide on Nunavik and Cultural Safety
Sheet 3 of 16





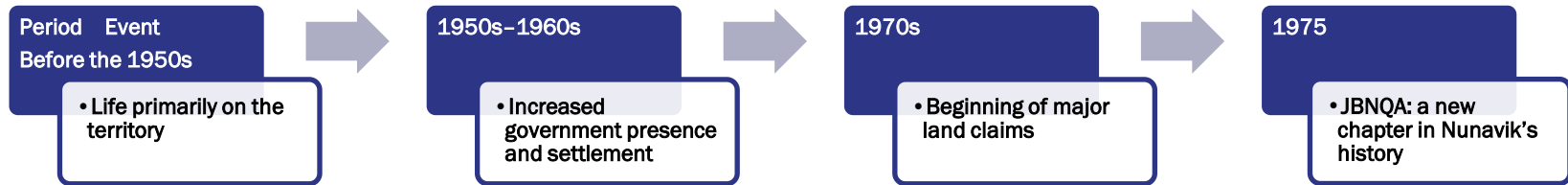
WHY THIS TOPIC IS IMPORTANT AT UTHC

The history of Nunavik is not merely a series of dates or events. It provides insight into various realities that continue to influence health, well-being, and relations between the Inuit and institutions today.

In just a few decades, the Inuit have undergone profound changes. The transition from a life spent primarily on the land to permanent communities, the arrival of government services, and the creation of new institutions have profoundly altered the daily lives of families and communities.

This history continues to shape how some people perceive institutions, including the healthcare system. Understanding it helps us better grasp certain realities experienced by service users, their families, and their communities.

Some Milestones in Nunavik's Recent History



IN PERSPECTIVE

In less than a generation, Nunavimmiut experienced profound changes that, elsewhere, have often taken place over several centuries.



NUNAVIK BEFORE THE MAJOR CHANGES

Before the 1950s, most Inuit in Nunavik lived primarily on the land. Families moved with the seasons, following natural resources and weather conditions.

Hunting, fishing, and trapping formed the basis of their diet and subsistence economy. Knowledge was passed down from one generation to the next through observation, experience, and the teachings of elders.

This way of life relied on a deep understanding of the land, a high degree of self-sufficiency, and strong solidarity among families. The territory was not merely a place to live; it formed the foundation of identity, social organization, and the transmission of knowledge.



A traditional Inuit camp in Nunavik.

GOOD TO KNOW: One Territory, Several Camps

Unlike today, most families did not live year-round in a permanent village.

Depending on the season, they occupied different hunting, fishing, or gathering camps, adapted to the available resources and their movements across the territory.

This mobility was an integral part of Inuit social organization, the transmission of knowledge, and their way of life.

The permanent villages we know today did not yet exist in their current form.



A TURNING POINT IN NUNAVIK'S RECENT HISTORY

Starting in the 1950s, the presence of the federal and provincial governments intensified in Nunavik. Against a backdrop of Northern modernization and the assertion of Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic, several public policies contributed to the gradual transformation of daily life in Inuit communities.

Over the following decades, health care, education, housing, public administration, and social programs took on an increasingly important role. Families were gradually encouraged, and in many cases required, to settle permanently in the villages.

These changes brought new opportunities but also led to significant social, cultural, and family upheavals.



Fort Chimo, in front of the H.B.C. post, 1948

NOTE: Why these changes?

Several factors explain this rapid transformation:

- the expansion of government services;
- the desire to ensure a Canadian presence in the Arctic;
- the development of health care and education;
- the creation of permanent settlements and new infrastructure.

These decisions profoundly transformed the organization of Inuit communities within the span of a few decades.



THE TRANSITION TO PERMANENT COMMUNITIES

In the mid-20th century, the majority of Nunavik's Inuit gradually transitioned from a way of life primarily organized around the territory to one centered on permanent villages.

This change was influenced by several factors, including the development of health care, education, housing, government programs, and infrastructure.

Sedentarization profoundly transformed family structures, lifestyles, mobility, and the transmission of knowledge.



Kangiqsujuaq 1966, Claude Hamelin, Avataq Collection.

NOTE: A change experienced by a single generation

For many elders still alive today, this transition is not a thing of the past.

Over the course of their lives, they have experienced:

- seasonal camps;
- the establishment of villages;
- the arrival of permanent schools;
- the first health clinics;
- new regional institutions.

These memories remain very much alive in many families in Nunavik.



A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Before settlement, contact with governments was relatively limited for most Inuit families.

With the creation of permanent villages, institutions are gradually playing an increasingly important role in daily life. Families now interact more regularly with schools, health services, public administrations, social programs, and government authorities.

For many Inuit, this transition represents a profound change. Decisions regarding education, healthcare, housing, and community organization are increasingly made within an institutional framework.

NOTE: Institutions became part of everyday life

In just a few decades, families have had to learn to cope with new realities:

- school attendance;
- health care services;
- government programs;
- permanent housing;
- new administrative rules.

These changes are gradually transforming the relationships between communities and institutions.

For many families, these changes meant not only the arrival of new services, but also a new way of living, learning, and interacting with institutions.



IMPACTS THAT ARE STILL FELT TODAY

The transformations that took place in the mid-20th century have left their mark, and their effects continue to influence the lives of many people, families, and communities today.

Some of these changes have led to improved access to healthcare, education, and new services. Others have profoundly altered people's connections to their local communities, families, languages, and institutions.

These realities help us better understand many current issues in health and social services.

NOTE: Upcoming fact sheets will explore, among other topics

In just a few decades, families have had to learn to cope with new realities:

- the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA);
- tuberculosis and medical evacuations;
- historical trauma, resilience, and healing;
- cultural security;
- the IQI approach developed at the UTHC.

For many families, these changes meant not only the arrival of new services, but also a new way of living, learning, and interacting with institutions.



WHY DOES THIS MATTER AT UTHC ?

Understanding Nunavik's recent history provides insight into certain realities that UTHC employees encounter in their daily work.

This history does not explain every individual situation, but it helps us better understand why certain experiences, reactions, or expectations may differ from one person to another.

Recognizing this history is a first step toward providing care and services that are more respectful, more tailored, and culturally safe.



IN PRACTICE AT THE UTHC

This understanding can, in particular, help to:

- ✓ recognize that trust in institutions can develop differently from one person to another;
- ✓ better understand the importance of family, community, and territory in many decisions;
- ✓ avoid making snap judgments in response to certain reactions or hesitations;
- ✓ foster an approach based on listening, respect, and partnership;
- ✓ better understand why cultural safety is now a priority at the UTHC.

LOOKING AHEAD

Understanding Nunavik's history is not about looking back on the past with guilt, but about gaining a deeper understanding of the realities people face today in order to provide care and services that are more humane, respectful, and reassuring.



A FEW WORDS IN INUKTITUT

Nunavimmiut

The people of Nunavik

In Inuktitut, the suffix **-miut** means *“the place of people.”*

It appears in several names:

- **Nunavimmiut:** the people of Nunavik;
- **Kuujuamiut:** the people of Kuujuuaq;
- **Sallumiut:** the people of Salluit.

This way of naming people serves as a reminder that, in Inuit culture, identity is deeply tied to the land and the community. This connection helps explain why the transformations of the 20th century affected much more than just places of residence: they also transformed the bonds between people, their land, and their communities.



DID YOU KNOW?

.....most of the major changes experienced by the Inuit of Nunavik have taken place in less than a generation?

Many of today's elders have experienced both life in camps across the territory and the establishment of permanent villages.

.....until the mid-20th century, the majority of Nunavik Inuit lived primarily on the land rather than in today's villages?

Seasonal migrations allowed them to follow natural resources and were an integral part of the Inuit way of life.

.....today's villages in Nunavik developed mainly in the 1950s and 1960s?

The gradual arrival of schools, health clinics, housing, and government services profoundly transformed the organization of communities.

.....the consequences of these changes are still reflected today in many aspects of life in Nunavik?

The next fact sheets will explore, among other topics, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, medical evacuations, historical trauma, and cultural security.



IN MY WORK AT THE UTHC

Understanding Nunavik's recent history allows us to approach care and services with a more informed perspective. While this history does not explain every individual situation, it provides essential context for better understanding the realities experienced by many service users, their families, and their communities.

This understanding can help me:

- better understand that trust in institutions can vary from person to person;
- avoid making snap judgments in response to certain reactions, hesitations, or concerns;
- better understand the importance of family, community, and territory in many decisions;
- adopt an approach based on listening, respect, and partnership;
- provide care and services that are better tailored to the realities of the people we support.

LOOKING AHEAD

Understanding Nunavik's recent history means better understanding the people we support today. This knowledge helps us build relationships based on respect, active listening, and trust.

The events of the past are part of history. Their repercussions, however, are still part of daily life for many people in Nunavik.



THE BASICS

- ✓ The Inuit of Nunavik already had a well-established way of life, social organization, and system of governance before the major changes of the 20th century.
- ✓ In just a few decades, the transition from seasonal camps to permanent villages profoundly transformed the daily lives of families and communities.
- ✓ The arrival of institutions enabled the development of new services, while permanently altering ties to the land, family, and traditional ways of life.
- ✓ The repercussions of these transformations are still part of the daily realities experienced by many people and communities in Nunavik.
- ✓ Understanding this history helps UTHC staff better comprehend the context in which clients live and provide more appropriate care and services.

LOOKING AHEAD

The past does not define the people we support, but it helps us better understand certain realities they still face today.



REFLECTING ON OUR PRACTICE

1. How can a better understanding of Nunavik's history influence the relationship of trust I build with clients and their families?
2. In what situations do I tend to make assumptions about someone's behavior or reaction without knowing the context in which that person grew up or developed?
3. What concrete steps can I take to demonstrate greater attentiveness, respect, and openness toward the realities experienced by the Nunavimmiut?



UTHC RECOMMENDATION

Restless River

ISUMA TV

Inspired by Gabrielle Roy's novel *La rivière sans repos*, this film follows the journey of Elsa, a young Inuk woman from Nunavik whose life is turned upside down in the late 1940s, as communities undergo a period of profound transformation. Through her story, the film sensitively illustrates the tensions between Inuit traditions and the changes brought about by the growing presence of institutions and *Qallunaat* society.

Why does the UTHC recommend it?

Because it offers a deeply human perspective on a pivotal period in Nunavik's recent history. More than just a historical account, it provides a better understanding of the realities experienced by many Inuit families and the changes that shaped subsequent generations.



GOING FURTHER

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada – [Archives](#)

The CNVR archives contain more than four million documents. The majority of these documents were created or collected by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) as part of its mandate, including survivor testimonies, which constitute the largest collection of perspectives from residential school survivors.

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) – [Calls to Justice](#)

A reference document that highlights the lasting impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples and proposes concrete courses of action.

Avataq Cultural Institute - [Blog](#)

To foster exchanges among Nunavimmiuts, the Avataq Cultural Institute provides this virtual space free of charge, led by a young Inuit woman from Nunavik.

Makivik Corporation – [Tarralik](#)

An essential resource for gaining a better understanding of Nunavik's recent history, land claims, and the development of Inuit institutions.

The history of Nunavik is more than a story of past changes. It continues to shape the present and reminds us that every encounter is an opportunity to build relationships based on understanding, respect, and trust.

