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Critical factors in the implementation of programs targeted to Aboriginal peoples: The Canadian experience

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This paper summarizes the results of a performance audit completed by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada and reported to Parliament in early 2006. The audit took an innovative approach to the complex area of Aboriginal programs that included applying an evaluation methodology to identify and understand factors critical to the successful design and delivery of programs.

Although the Canadian federal government spent just over \$8 billion in 2004-05 on 360 programs targeted to Aboriginal people that address issues such as housing, health care, education, and economic development, the conditions in many First Nations communities and of many Aboriginal people remain significantly below the national average.

The audit assessed the progress of federal departments in implementing recommendations the Auditor General made between 2000 and 2003 on Aboriginal programs. The recommendations focussed on housing on reserves, economic development, third-party management, reporting requirements, health, the food mail program, and land claims.

Overall, progress was found to be unsatisfactory, especially for recommendations most likely to improve the lives of Aboriginal people. The Office's typical audits make observations, but do not get at the "whys"; this audit was different in that it took an evaluative approach and attempted to ascertain some of the reasons for lack of progress.

This innovative approach resulted in the identification of seven factors that appear to be critical to the successful implementation of recommendations, and to the successful design and delivery of programs targeted to Aboriginal peoples.