
Frequently Asked Questions

Secure Certificate of Indian Status

Q.1 What is a Certificate of Indian Status or Status card and why does INAC issue it?

The Certificate of Indian Status, more commonly referred to as a Status card, is an identity document issued for administrative reasons by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to confirm that the cardholder is registered as a Status Indian under the *Indian Act*.

Q.2 Why is INAC creating a new and improved Status card?

This initiative is called the Secure Certificate of Indian Status Project. It originated through a joint initiative between the Assembly of First Nations and the Lands and Trust Services Sector of INAC and a related project with Treaty 7 First Nations. The goal is to address the need for increased security features on Status cards so issues of stolen identity and fraud can be reduced or eliminated.

The current version of the Status card is a laminated paper document that is not protected from forgery or counterfeiting. It can easily be misused through alteration or illegal reproduction. This has caused problems in accessing benefits for some legally entitled First Nation individuals and has led to significant pressures to replace the current card with a card that incorporates the security features of a modern identification document.

The new Secure Certificate of Indian Status features several security improvements that significantly reduce the risk of unauthorized alterations or duplication. This helps to ensure the ongoing integrity of the programs and services by protecting them from incidences of fraud and identity theft. Status Indians will have easier access to the services and benefits they are eligible to receive, as service providers will have renewed confidence knowing these cards are legitimate.

Q.3 When will INAC Regional and District Offices be ready to process Secure Certificate of Indian Status applications?

At this time Indian and Northern Affairs is not in a position to provide a specific date when the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status will be available nationally. INAC will provide further updates on the progress, and will announce a launch date when we are ready.

Q.4 Why is there a delay with the national roll-out of the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status?

INAC's priority has been to complete a quality assurance review on the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status issuance process of the Mobile Application Centre deployment so that individuals residing near the Canada-US Border have an opportunity to pre-apply for the SCIS. This has been completed.

INAC is now undertaking a review of the overall technical infrastructure and integration of the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status initiative, which will delay the national implementation.

Q.5 Why was the Mobile Application Centre unit deployment delayed initially?

In February 2009, INAC began deploying Mobile Application Centre units to First Nations border communities across Canada to help process advance applications for the card. The Mobile Application Centre deployment was the first opportunity for INAC to test the Secure Certificate of Indian Status issuance process in a live environment. Based on recent observations, INAC undertook a quality assurance review on the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status issuance process for the Mobile Application Centre deployment which caused delays.

The quality assurance review is an administrative step, which will provide further assurance to First Nations individuals that their application information is protected.

Q.6 Will the Mobile Application Centre units be redeployed?

Yes, INAC has completed the quality assurance review on the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status issuance process and will be redeploying the Mobile Applications Centres beginning late July 2009.

All Communities that were delayed are being contacted to schedule new dates in these communities.

Q.7 Will individuals who have already applied through the Mobile Application Centre be receiving their card or will they have to reapply?

Applicants who have already applied will not have to reapply.

Q.8 When will INAC begin printing the new Secure Certificates of Indian Status?

INAC will begin printing Secure Certificates of Indian Status for those who have applied at the Mobile Application Centre units in the Fall of 2009.

Q.9 How many versions of the Secure Certificates of Indian Status will be available?

INAC will have two versions of the Secure Certificate of Indian Status in circulation.

Version 1: Contains Machine-Readable Zone:

- Acceptable document when visiting the US via land and water ports-of-entry
- Only issued to individuals who are born within Canada or the United States, regardless of citizenship
- Issued to cardholders who give consent to sharing information with Canada Border Services Agency and, only when presented, to the US Customs and Border Protection when visiting the US by land and water
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Version 2: Does not contain a Machine-Readable Zone:

- Is not an acceptable document when visiting the US via land and water ports-of-entry.
- The only format that will be issued to a cardholder that is born outside the US or Canada, regardless of Citizenship
- Issued to cardholders that do not wish to have their personal data shared with Canada Border Services Agency and US Customs Border Protection

To see the prototype's of the SCIS please visit the ["New Card Design"](#) section of our website.

Q.10 Will the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status be accepted for Canada-United States border crossings?

The Government of Canada has received notification from the United States that the U.S. Customs and Border Protection has approved the business plan for the Secure Certificate of Indian Status and is in the process of designating the card as a Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative-compliant document to enter the U.S. by land or water. This means that once available, the Secure Certificates of Indian Status will be accepted when visiting the US by land or water.

INAC will inform all First Nations of any developments on this important issue through www.inac.gc.ca.

Q.11 Should First Nations that rely on their status card to cross the border obtain other documentation?

The United States Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative is currently being applied with a practical and common sense approach, which includes a period of flexibility. **During this period of flexibility, the current Certificate of Indian Status will be an acceptable document to present when visiting the United States by land or water.**

The Government of Canada cautions individuals that the period and extent of this flexibility is entirely at the discretion of U.S. officials and reminds travelers that when entering the US via air that valid passport or NEXUS card is required

INAC will inform all First Nations of any developments on this important issue through www.inac.gc.ca.

To find out which documents are accepted when visiting the United States via land and water, please visit Canada Border Services Agency website at <http://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/whti-ivho/menu-eng.html> [Air travel has different documentation requirements. Visit cbsa.gc.ca for more information]

Q.12 Who is eligible for a Status card and what is it used for?

Any individual registered as an Indian under the *Indian Act* is eligible for a Status card, regardless of age, and can voluntarily apply for a card. The Status card is provided to assist registered Indians in accessing a wide range of entitlements, programs and services administered by federal agencies, provincial governments and other private sector program and service providers. Many of these organizations use the Status card as the main or sole proof that a person is entitled to receive the benefits.

Q.13 Will Applicants be charged a fee to obtain or renew their Status card? Is the Status card compulsory?

No, the Government of Canada will not be charging Applicants any fees to obtain or renew their Status card.

This card is NOT compulsory, but will help Applicants obtain all the benefits they are entitled to as a registered Indian quickly and efficiently.

Q.14 Why and how often do Status cards need to be renewed?

Renewals of current Status Cards and the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status are necessary to comply with international standards (International Civil Aviation Organization) and to meet the requirements of updating cardholder's personal information and photograph. Renewal dates for Status cards are automatically linked with the cardholder's date of birth. For those 16 years of age and over, the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status will be renewable every five years on or before the individual's birthday. For those 15 years of age and under the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status will be renewable every three years on or before the cardholder's birthday.

Q.15 How will the secure card be an improvement?

The enhanced version of the Status card incorporates modern national and international standards for document security. The prototype card has been designed as a result of a survey, focus group testing and several evaluations led by the Canada Border Services Agency. This secure version of the Status card will include specialized graphic design elements and enhanced security features that will protect the privacy of the cardholder while minimizing the opportunity for unauthorized alteration, duplication or use. Once we begin to issue the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status all earlier paper laminated versions will no longer be issued. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada will ensure that all cardholders are made aware of any potential changes in a timely manner.

The new Secure Certificate of Indian Status represents the Government of Canada's continued commitment to strengthening its relationship with First Nations individuals and organizations. All partners continue to work to address concerns around the current Status cards and the broader goal of improving the overall quality of life of Canada's Aboriginal peoples by ensuring that those eligible to receive services and benefits are able to access them quickly and efficiently.

Q.16 What are the accepted forms of identification required to obtain a new Secure Certificate of Indian Status?

Registered Indians 16 years and older:

- Your previous valid status card; AND
- Your original birth certificate (long or short form); AND
- Other valid* form of identification

Registered Indians 65 years of age:

- Your previous valid status card; AND
- Other valid* form of identification

Children 15 years of age and under:

- To be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian
- The parent or legal guardian must present a valid* form of photo identification
- Legal guardians will also require documentation of guardianship
- The child will need to present an original birth certificate (long or short form) and, as appropriate, any previous valid status card (or Statutory Declaration)

***Other valid forms of identification include:**

- Passport (equivalent to 2 IDs)
- Driver's license (provincial or territorial)
- Student ID (with digitized photograph)
- Government-issued employee ID card (with digitized photograph)

- Other government-issued ID card (including federal, provincial or territorial)
- An ID card from a recognized Self-Governing First Nation (with digitized photograph)

If a valid status card (renewal date has not been reached) is not available, the individual will have to fill in a Statutory Declaration and the adult must present an alternative ID (with a photo).

If an individual has never been issued a status card, they must present a valid photo ID.

For more detailed information on what documents are required please visit the application information section on our website at www.inac-ainc.gc.ca

Q.17 What are the advantages of introducing the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status?

A broad range of potential advantages, both direct and indirect, will result from introducing the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status. Immediate benefits include improved client service, ease of use and fewer cards being rejected or questioned by service providers. Cardholders will have easier access to the programs and services they are legally entitled to receive. It also means faster processing of transactions, a reduction in identity fraud and misuse related to the existing card, and reduced complexity in accessing programs and services.

Q.18 Will the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status contain a microchip or “smart card” features?

No.

Q.19 How is personal information appearing on Status cards protected under Privacy legislation?

Privacy is a key element of all aspects of this project. Personal information contained in the Indian Register and maintained by INAC is protected under the federal *Privacy Act*. Any concerns regarding this Act should be directed to the Privacy Commissioner of Canada at the toll-free number of 1-800-282-1376. Further information is available on web site for the Privacy Commissioner of Canada http://www.priv.gc.ca/leg_c/index_e.cfm

Status cards containing personal information from the Indian Register are issued to individuals only with their consent in the form of a signed application for a Secure Certificate of Indian Status. Once a Status card is issued to an individual, like all other forms of identification (i.e. drivers license), it is then the responsibility of the individual to protect the card and the information it contains.

Q.20 Does the information contained on the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status differ from the paper laminated version?

No. The personal information contained on the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status includes the same data as the current paper laminated Status Card. The data fields included on the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status are the person's name, card number, registration number, gender and date of birth.

Like all forms of identification, it is the responsibility of the individual to protect the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status and the information it contains.

Q.21 Where will the Secure Certificate of Indian Status be issued, and will First Nations continue to be involved in the card issuance process? How long will it take to obtain a new Secure Certificate of Indian Status?

Currently, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Headquarters, Regional and District offices and about 485 Indian Registry Administrators (IRAs) located at First Nations' offices issue Status cards. During the initial phase of the national implementation only INAC Regional and District Offices will be able to process applications for the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status.

Note: The laminated version of the Certificate of Indian Status can only be used to access programs and services available to First Nations individuals. Once the period of flexibility ends on the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, it will NOT be accepted by US Customs Border Patrol when visiting the US via land and water ports-of-entry.

Q.22 Will the new Secure Certificates of Indian Status be printed at the Regional and District Offices? How long will it take to obtain a new Secure Certificate of Indian Status?

The only change to the issuance process is that the actual cards will be printed at a National Print Centre. Once printed, the cards will be mailed directly to the individual or sent to the INAC Officers, who will contact the individual to arrange for pick-up, which should happen within a couple of weeks of an application being submitted for processing.

Q.23 Will the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status enable First Nations persons born in Canada to travel to the United States to live or work without obtaining an alien registration card (green card) or work permit?

Laws of United States Immigration and Naturalization require that First Nations persons born in Canada have at least 50 percent Aboriginal blood quantum to enter the United States to live or work without a green card or work permit.

Canadian law is different in that registration as an Indian under the provisions of the *Indian Act* is not based on percentage of Indian blood quantum. Under previous *Indian Acts*, it was possible for non-Indians to gain Indian status through marriage. Under the current Act, non-Indians can gain status through adoption by registered Indians.

As such, United States Immigration and Naturalization usually requests that an individual provide a letter of blood quantum from his or her First Nation or a letter from an INAC office verifying an individual's Indian ancestry. For further information, check the United States Embassy, Consular Services Canada website at http://www.consular.canada.usembassy.gov/first_nations_canada.asp

Q.24 Is there a link between the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status and the Jay Treaty?

No. The Jay Treaty of 1794 provided free border crossing rights for “the Indians dwelling on either side of the boundary line” between Upper and Lower Canada and the United States, and exemption from duty or taxes on their “own proper goods” when crossing the border.

After the War of 1812, the Treaty of Ghent between Britain and the United States was intended to restore the border crossing rights of the Jay Treaty, but legislation implementing these rights in Upper and Lower Canada lapsed. Because of this, the Jay Treaty is not recognized in Canada. There is therefore no link between the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status and the Jay Treaty.

In the 1920s, the United States changed its immigration laws and ever since Canadian-born

people with at least 50 per cent Aboriginal blood can enter, live in and work in the United States without immigration restrictions.

Q.25 Can First Nations expect any changes concerning the ways the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status will be used?

There are no changes planned as to how INAC will use the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status. This is largely a matter determined by service or program providers outside of INAC. However, INAC will take steps to raise awareness among cardholders, service providers and all government agencies of the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status as a valid and credible proof of Indian status.

Q.26 How will stakeholders such as service providers and provinces/territories be made aware of the implementation of the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status?

An information campaign will be launched to inform all stakeholders of the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status implementation plan.

Q.27 After the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status is introduced, how many different versions of valid Status cards will there be?

There will be a transition period while INAC and Indian Registry Administrators' offices are provided with the equipment necessary to process and activate the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status. As soon as the new processing equipment is available regionally and at the First Nation level, only the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status will be issued. During this transition period, four versions of the card will co-exist: the paper laminated version, the pilot Status cards and the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status. Older versions of the Status card will remain valid until their renewal date, or for a five year period after the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status is introduced.

Q.28 Do service providers and other organizations have access to the information contained in the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status? What will they do with the information?

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has no ability to control how service providers and other organizations use the information. It is up to individual cardholders to decide if they want to voluntarily allow such organizations to have access to the information on their card. Keep in mind that the Machine Readable Zone contains no more information than is already clearly visible on the card. Once a cardholder voluntarily allows a service provider or other organization access to the Status card, the information that is visibly present on the card is then available to that business or organization.

Q.29 Can I apply for the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status by mail?

Due to the security measures associated with the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status, mail-in applications will not normally be accepted. However, if circumstances prevent you from applying in person, please contact your Regional INAC office.

Further Information

For further information related to your eligibility to be registered as a Status Indian, or to obtain a new Secure Certificate of Indian Status once you are registered, contact any IRA or INAC office. Further information regarding the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status is available by telephoning toll-free **1-800-567-9604**, emailing InfoPubs@ainc-inac.gc.ca or viewing the INAC Web site.

Further information relating to various benefit entitlements can be found at the following Web sites:

Benefits Information, Non-Insured Health Benefits, First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Health Canada - <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/index-eng.php> or 1-800-259-5611

Status Indians, Aboriginal Peoples, Canada Revenue Agency - <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/brgnls/ndns-eng.html> or 613-598-2275

Dental -1-888-332-9222