



# **Income Assistance in First Nations: National Questionnaire Analysis**

May 31, 2026

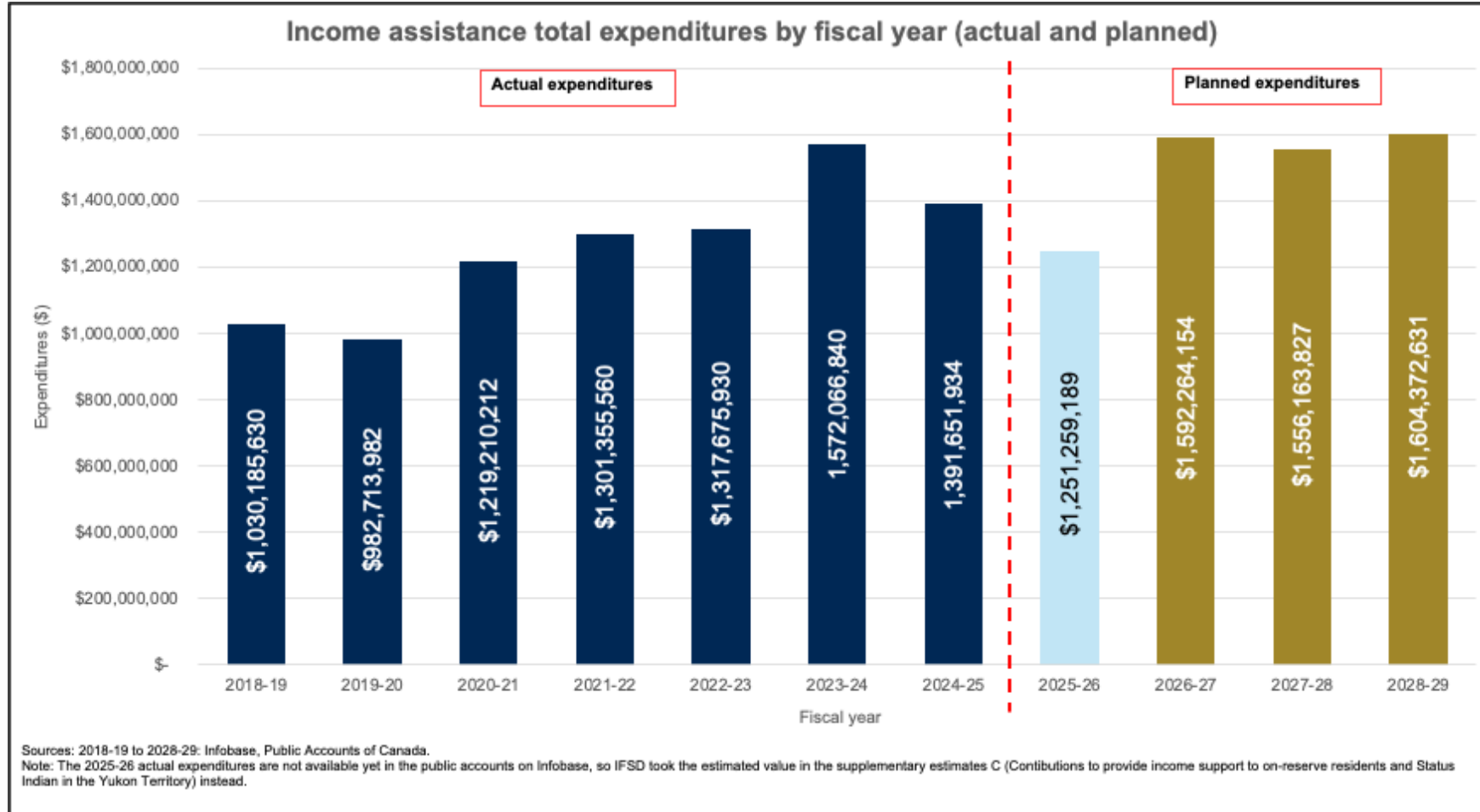
## IFSD's mandate

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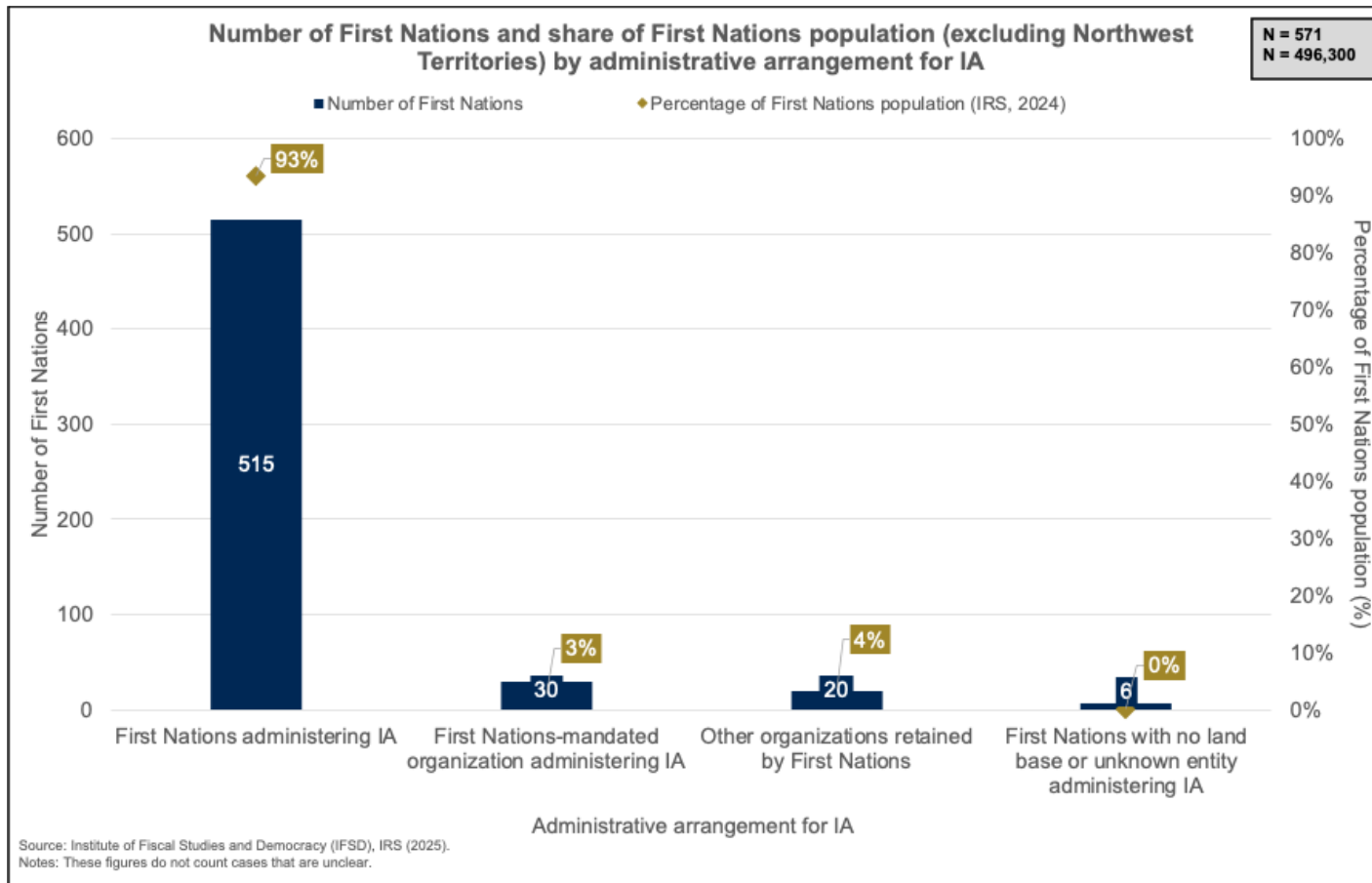
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- Develop a First Nations-specific funding model for the Income Assistance (IA) Program based on First Nations policy recommendations.
- Project components:
  - Define the current state portrait of the IA Program in First Nations.
  - Capture practices in First Nations related to training, administration, etc.
  - Propose an approach to developing and maintaining IA data systems, implementing a data collection strategy, and undertake analysis to assess program performance and outcomes for First Nations.
  - Estimate the cost of First Nations-developed reforms of the IA program (including administration), and the cost of increased funding needed to raise IA payments to a level consistent with a measure of livable income.

# Federal expenditures on IA



# Administrative arrangements for IA in First Nations in Canada



- IFSD's outreach to First Nations indicated that most First Nations (90%) administer IA independently.
- Alternative arrangements include First Nation-mandated and non-Indigenous service delivery organizations.

## Questionnaire data gaps

Question		Number of responses	Usable responses	Number of blanks	Removed by IFSD
Number of people accessing IA in the First Nation		166	166	7	0
Rates for basic necessities and shelter		131	114	42	17
Rates by family type	Individual	159	154	14	5
	Individual + 2 dependents	151	144	22	7
	Couple	146	141	27	5
	Couple + 2 dependents	148	141	25	7
Funding amount by source	Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)	114	91	59	23
	Province/territory	78	17	95	61
	First Nation/Band	72	4	101	68
	Other	62	9	111	53
	Total	95	95	N/A	N/A
Number of FTEs delivering IA		163	158	10	5



## Questionnaire findings

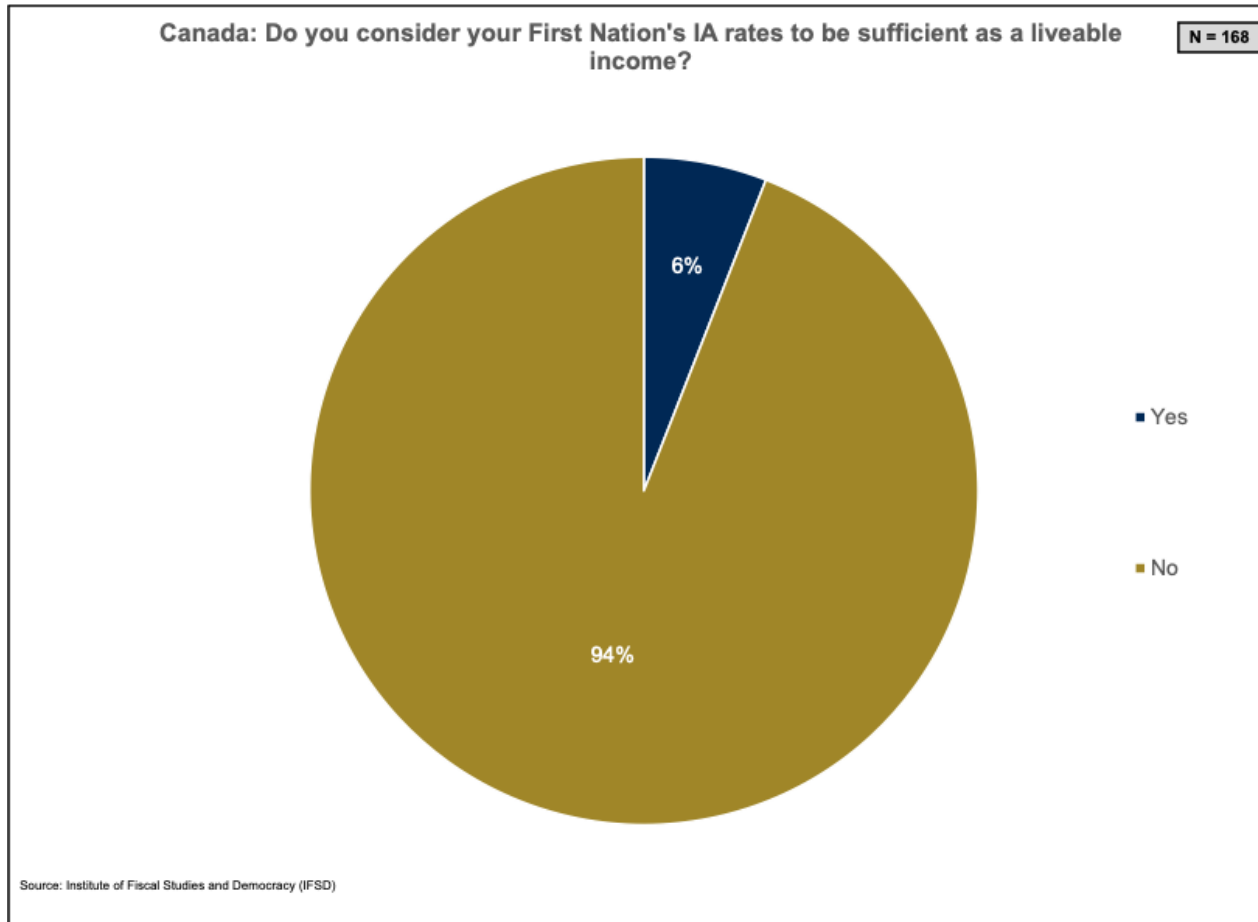
## Summary of findings

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- The IA program exhibits **structural dysfunctions** that cannot be explained by a single factor or point of failure. Key aspects of the program's delivery remain difficult to understand.
- There is a clear **policy design** problem:
  - Benefits are insufficient, as reported by nearly all questionnaire respondents.
  - Misalignment between program structure and delivery, as model is optimized for payment delivery rather than case management.
  - Program structure does not align to objective of temporary assistance via IA.
- IA's delivery model appears optimized for **payment delivery** rather than **case management**.
- IA's funding model is **strongly related to on-reserve population**, but data is insufficient to explain why or to assess the impact of funding.

## Perceived sufficiency of IA rates



- Nearly all respondents (94%), reported that IA rates are insufficient as a liveable income.

## Maximum average rates (fiscal year 2024-25) by family type

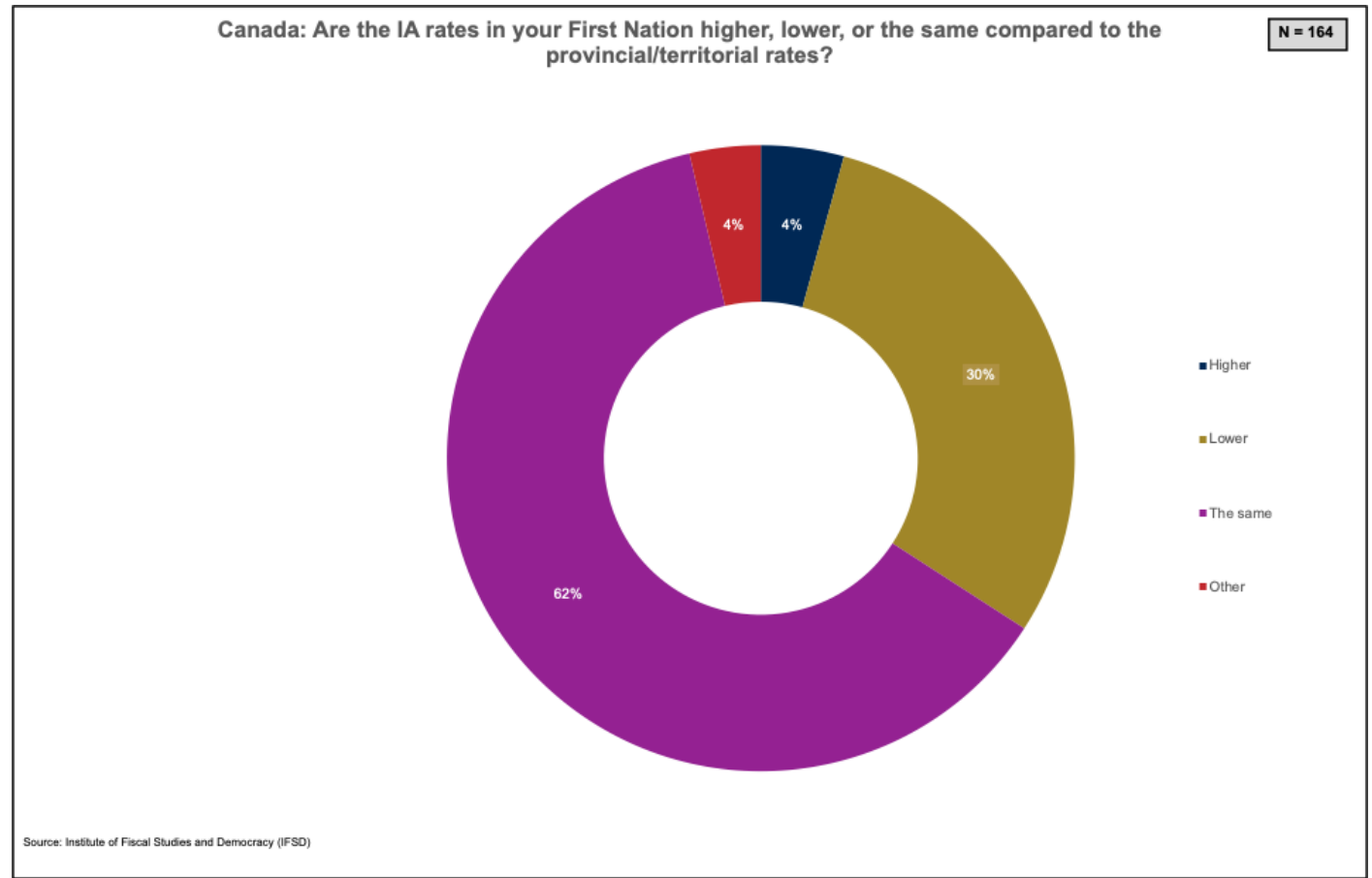
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Family type	Median	Average	N-value (clean)
Individual	\$560	\$605	154
Individual + 2 dependents	\$757	\$904	144
Couple	\$955	\$1,015	141
Couple + 2 dependents	\$1,055	\$1,176	141

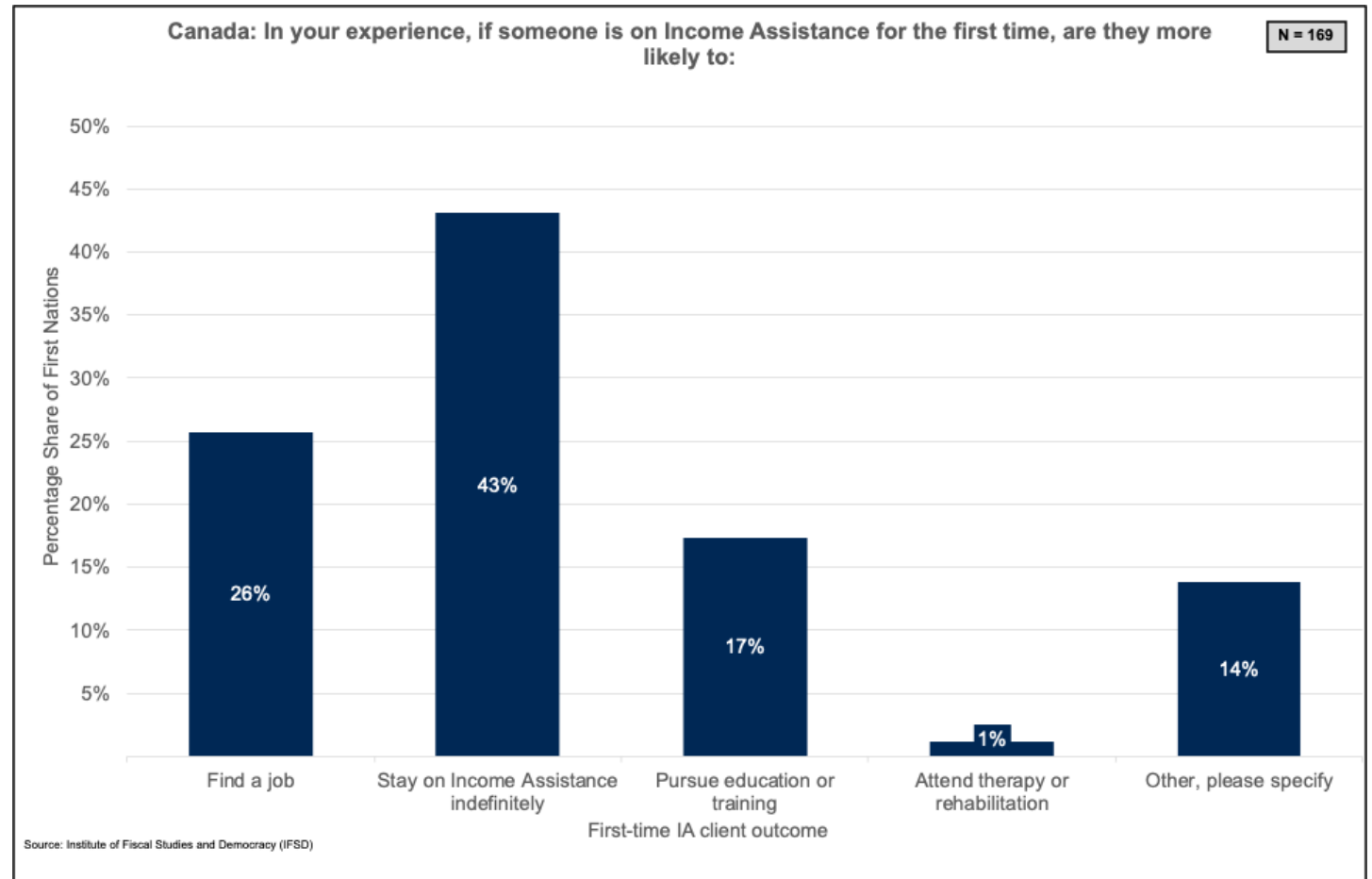
## On-reserve IA rates vs. Provincial/Territorial rates

- 62% of surveyed administrators report that IA rates in their First Nation are comparable to provincial/territorial rates.
- 30% report that their rates are lower than those of the province/territory.



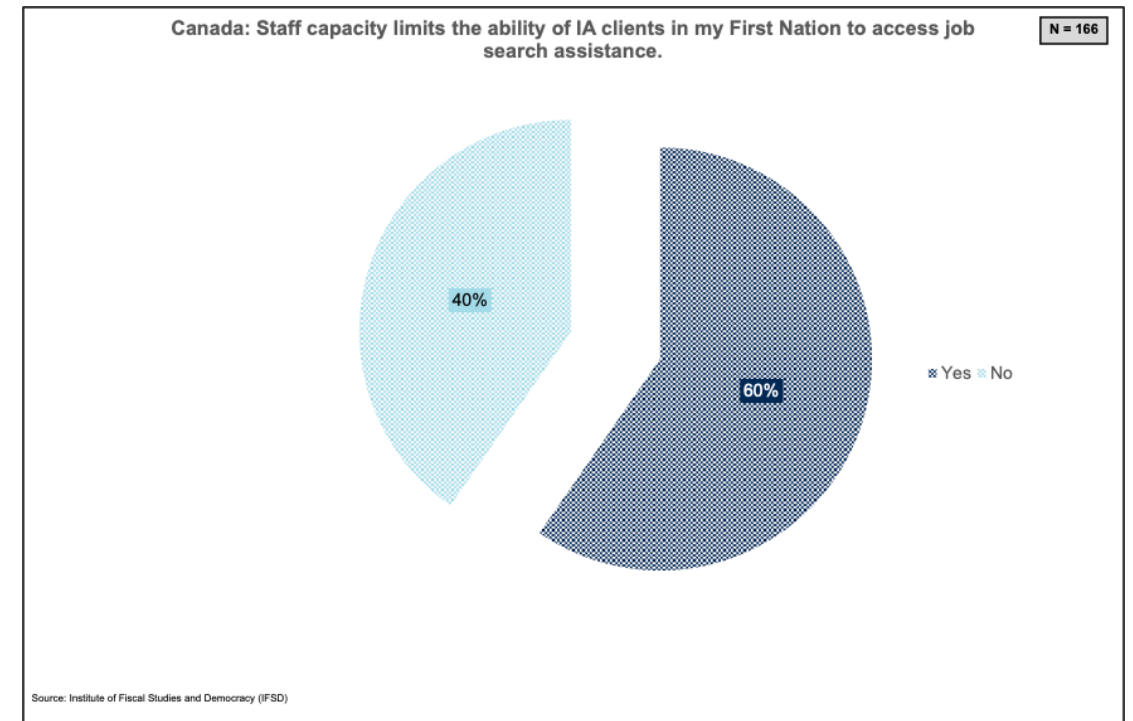
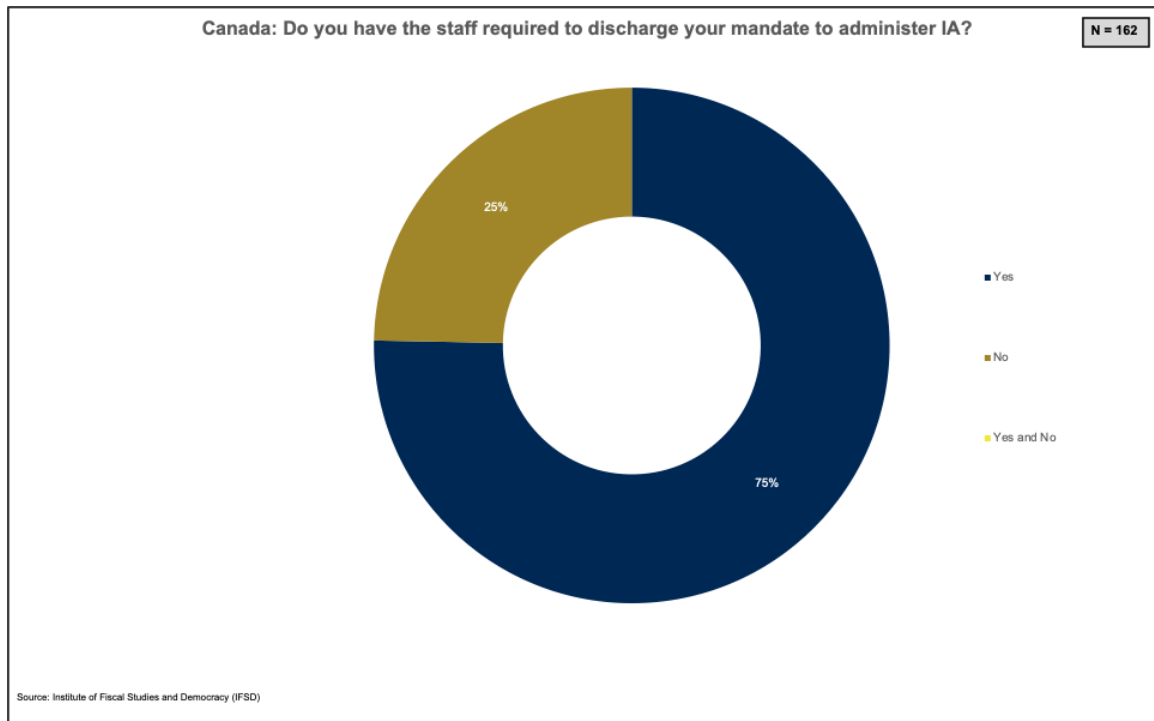
## IA client outcomes

- Almost half of survey respondents (43%) reported that new IA clients were likely to stay on IA indefinitely.
- About a quarter (26%) reported they were likely to find a job, and 17% to pursue education or training.



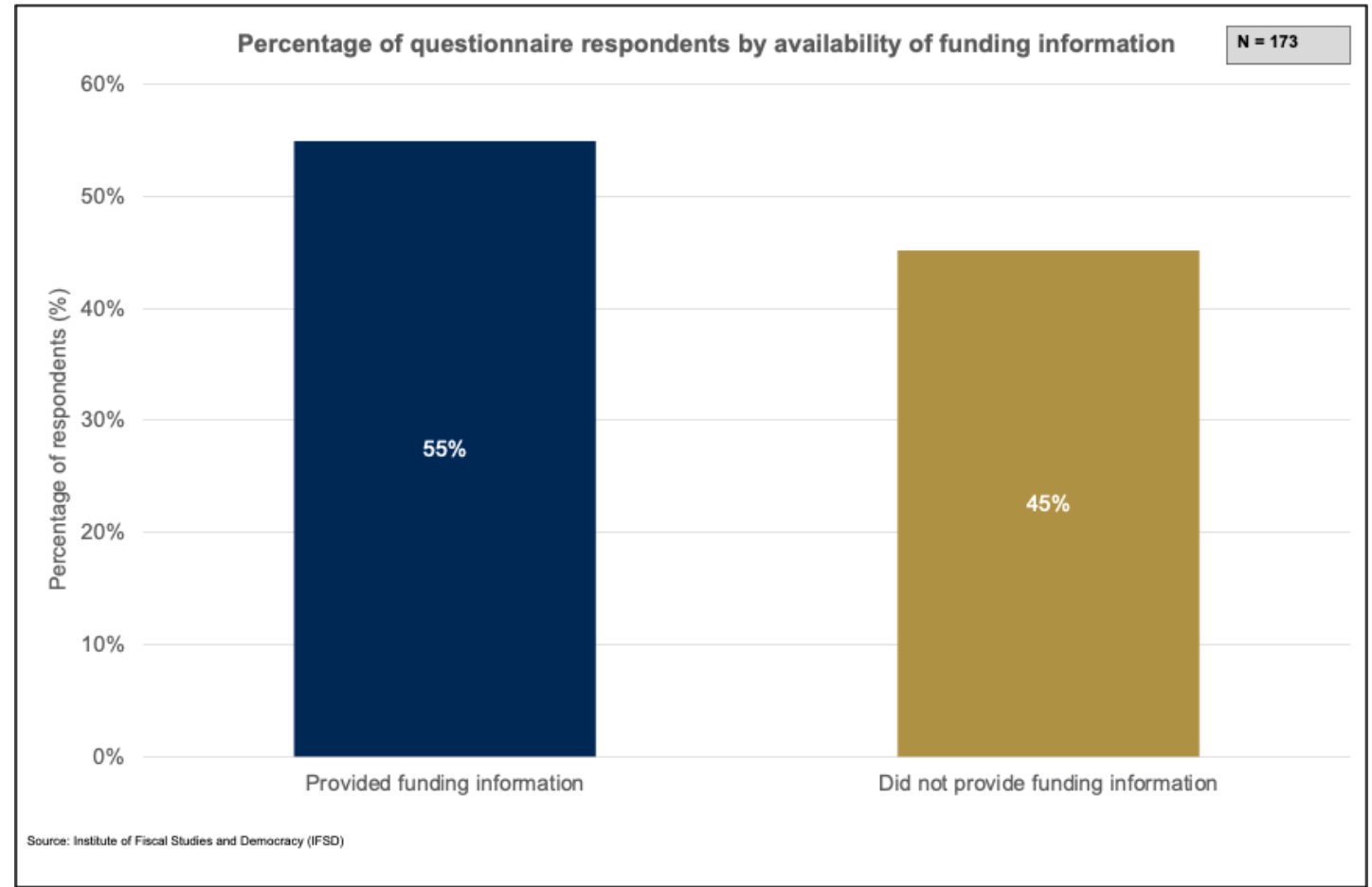
# Staffing

- Most IA administrators report having sufficient staff to discharge their mandate but also indicate that limited staffing restricts their ability to deliver client supports.

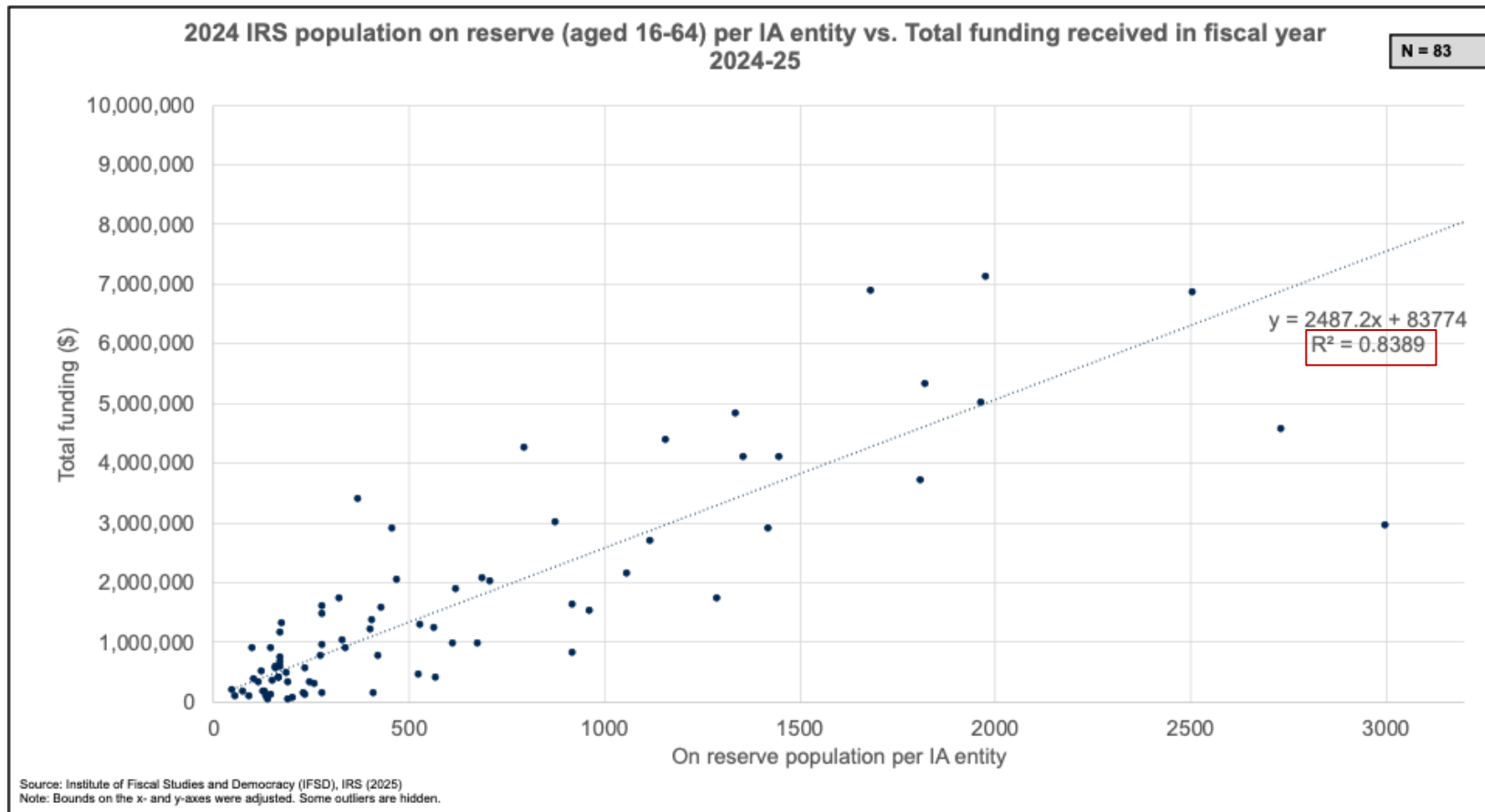


## Reporting of financial data in IFSD's questionnaire

- Of total survey respondents, 55% provided information on funding amounts by source for IA.
- 45% did not provide information on funding amounts for the IA program.



# IA funding vs. on-reserve population



- Strong relationship between IA funding and eligible population for IA.
  - The larger the population size, the higher IA funding.
- Deviations from the trend appear as population grows (~500 people).