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In It Together

Multigenerational Living in Canada

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Households are continuously evolving in Canada, as shifting economic, demographic and social forces shape our living arrangements. Many families are living together longer, as a number of factors are creating or increasing incentives for several generations to live under one roof. High unemployment rates among youth are leading a growing proportion to continue living in the parental home for longer (or, for students, to return after completing their studies). For seniors and elders, increasing life expectancy and the proliferation of mobility technologies have provided them with more choice over where and how to live. As a result, there has been an increase in households in Canada containing three or more generations. The 2011 Census counted 362,600 of these multigenerational households in Canada, accounting for 2.7% of all private households.^{1,2}



But the Census counts don't provide a complete picture of multigenerational living. Not included in Statistics Canada's definition of multigenerational households are those that consist solely of parents and their adult children, a living arrangement that has been steadily increasing for decades. The proportion of young adults aged 20 to 29 living in the parental home has increased from 27% in 1981 to 42% in 2011.³ This shift has reduced the stigma associated with living in the parental home, which in itself can make young adults less hesitant to live with their parents.

Census counts of multigenerational homes also overlook households comprised of seniors and elders living with their adult children, another living arrangement on the rise. The proportion of Canadians aged 65 and older is higher than ever, and as life expectancy continues to increase, this trend is set to continue into the near future. Many adult children

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have set up accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in their homes for their parents that have been designed for senior living, sometimes referred to as “granny flats” or “in-law suites.” The renovations involved in establishing these living spaces are often relatively minor and can allow seniors to navigate homes with little assistance or risk of injury.

A growing number of children in Canada now share a home with their grandparents and great-grandparents. The proportion of children under the age of 14 living with a grandparent increased from 3.3% in 2001 to 4.8% in 2011,⁴ which has created new opportunities for intergenerational bonds. Sometimes, grandparents are solely responsible for raising their grandchildren without the parents present in the household. In 2011, over 30,000 children aged 14 and under lived in these “skip-generation” families.⁵

Multigenerational households are diverse, and they vary across communities in Canada. For example, 9.1% of Aboriginal children lived in multigenerational households in 2011 (10.7% of Inuit children, 10.5% of First Nations children and 5.6% of Métis children), compared with 3.9% of non-Aboriginal children.⁶ Immigrants to Canada, who now account for more than one in five of the total population, are twice as likely as their Canadian-born counterparts to live in multigenerational households.^{7, 8}

Multigenerational living provides numerous benefits for families. Regardless of their age, having extra people in the home means there are more people

to help with household tasks and chores – “many hands make light work,” as the saying goes. Senior and elderly parents who live with their adult children *and* their grandchildren can sometimes help the “middle generation” provide care to the youngest generation – a benefit to parents who may have a hard time finding affordable, quality child care.

There are also potential benefits for adult children who provide caregiving to their senior and elderly parents and who may choose to cohabitate to avoid or reduce some of the stressors that can result from providing care to someone who lives out of town or in another province (39% of all family caregivers reported that they provided care to a parent in 2012). Long-distance caregiving contributes to emotional and financial stress for the caregiver. So, it is perhaps not surprising that nearly one-quarter (24%) of Canadians who provided care to their parents in 2012 lived with the care recipient(s).⁹ Even if senior parents in multigenerational homes aren’t care recipients, the family support that accompanies living together can enhance their well-being.

Living in multigenerational households can also have economic advantages for all residents, as the household costs can be split among a greater number of residents. These lower costs can help to reduce the risk of poverty and food insecurity. In a 2010 study of multigenerational living in the United States, researchers found that the poverty rate in multigenerational homes¹⁰ was lower than that of their

single-generational counterparts (11.5% and 14.6%, respectively). For those without jobs, the difference was far more pronounced: poverty rates for unemployed Americans was 17.5% for those living in multigenerational households, compared with 30.3% for those living in other households.¹¹ Sharing a home would likely provide similar economic advantages to residents of multigenerational homes in Canada.

Architects and homebuilders associations are taking note of the increase in multigenerational living. In fact, floor plans and building designs targeted at multigenerational living have become a selling point for this growing niche market. Often, these designs incorporate a “home within a home” – that is, a full home with a separate, private apartment attached to it. Extra living spaces can have their own separate entrance or they can share one with the primary living space. Multigenerational homes sometimes feature open floor plans and wider doorways and hallways, which can allow for better traffic flow. Generally speaking, the more generations living under one roof, the more versatile the house has to be.

In the case of senior parents living with adult children, this extra living space may also be equipped with features such as extra handrails, walk-in bathtubs, stair lifts and other accessories specifically designed for senior living. In some cases, this may even involve accessibility features, such as elevators and first-floor bedrooms and bathrooms.

As Canada’s population continues to age, and as household costs increase and families evolve, multigenerational households will likely become more common. Ultimately, this may not be an aberration from the norm but rather a return to living arrangement patterns that were dominant prior to the Second World War, when sharing a household with extended family was far more common. Regardless, this shift reflects one of the many ways in which Canadian families adapt to and impact economic, demographic and social forces. The rise in multi-



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generational living brings with it new challenges, as family members will seek to balance their need or desire to live with more family members with their own needs for privacy and control over their living space. At the same time, it creates new opportunities to form and strengthen bonds between family members and multiple generations.

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¹ “Multigenerational households” are defined by Statistics Canada as households that contain three or more generations, and at least one census family. A census family consists of a married couple (with or without children), a common-law couple (with or without children) or a lone parent family.

² Statistics Canada, “Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada,” *Census Analytical Products*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 98-312-X-2011001 (September 2012), accessed December 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1hAm7HE>.

³ Statistics Canada, “Living Arrangements of Young Adults Aged 20 to 29,” *Census Analytical Products*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 98-312-X-2011003 (September 2012), accessed December 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/18Frq5X>.

⁴ Statistics Canada, “Distribution (Number and Percentage) of Population Aged 14 and Under in Private Households by Selected Living Arrangements, Canada, 2001 to 2011” (table 5), *Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 98-312-X-2011001 (September 2012), accessed December 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1jqfKG4>.

⁵ Statistics Canada, “Portrait of Families and Living Arrangements in Canada.”

⁶ Statistics Canada, “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit,” *National Household Survey (NHS) Analytical Products 2011*,

Statistics Canada catalogue no. 99-011-X2011001 (July 2011), accessed December 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1G4IOA>.

⁷ Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *Canadian Housing Observer 2012* (2012), accessed December 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1KN7Ft>.

⁸ Statistics Canada, “Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada,” *NHS Analytical Products, 2011*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 99-010-X (May 2013), accessed December 17, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1gjVgiC>.

⁹ Martin Turcotte, “Family Caregiving: What Are the Consequences?” *Insights on Canadian Society*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 75-006-X (September 2013), accessed December 4, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1cZs0SJ>.

¹⁰ In the Pew study, multigenerational households consisted of two adult generations (e.g. a household head with an adult child or with a parent), three or more generations (e.g. a householder, adult child and grandchild) or two “skipped” generations (e.g. a grandparent and a grandchild).

¹¹ Rakesh Kochhar and D’vera Cohn, “Fighting Poverty in a Bad Economy, Americans Move In with Relatives,” *Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends*, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://bit.ly/19falxZ>.