A SNAPSHOT OF
POPULATION AGING AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN CANADA

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The Vanier Institute of the Family is a national, independent, charitable organization dedicated to understanding the diversity and complexity of families and the reality of family life in Canada. The Institute offers access to a range of publications, research initiatives, presentations and social media content to enhance the national understanding of how families interact with, have an impact on and are affected by social, economic, environmental and cultural forces.

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Canada's population is aging rapidly, with a higher share of seniors than ever before. While this can present some societal challenges, it also provides growing opportunities for intergenerational relationships, since younger people have a greater likelihood of having more seniors and elders in their lives. Population aging has an impact not only on family relationships, but also on the social, economic, cultural and environmental contexts in which families live.

While Canada has a lower share of seniors than most G7 countries, our population is aging at an accelerating rate and, for the first time, there are more seniors than children aged 0 to 14.1

In 2016, there were more than 5.8 million children aged 0 to 14 in Canada (+4.1% since 2011), accounting for 16.6% of the population.2 3

5.8 million children

Nunavut has the highest share of children in Canada, at 32.5% of its population.

Newfoundland and Labrador has the lowest share of children in Canada, at 14.3% of its population.

In 2016, there were nearly 23.4 million working-aged (15 to 64) people in Canada, accounting for 66.5% of the population, compared with 68.5% in 2011. Projections show that this share will continue to fall and may reach 60% by 2031.4

23.4 million

Yukon has the highest share of working-age people in Canada, at 70.6% of its population in 2016.

Nunavut has the lowest share of working-age people in Canada, at 63.7% of its population in 2016.

In 2016, there were more than 5.9 million seniors in Canada (+20% since 2011), accounting for 16.9% of the population.5

The senior population is projected to grow further, reaching nearly one-quarter (23%) of Canadians by 2031.6

5.9 million seniors

Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have the highest share of seniors in Canada, at 19.9% of each province’s population in 2016.

Nunavut has the lowest share of seniors in Canada, at 3.8% of its population in 2016.

In 2016, there were more than 8,200 centenarians (aged 100+) in Canada (+41% since 2011) – the fastest-growing age group in Canada. Projections show that the number of centenarians in Canada could reach nearly 40,000 by 2051.7

8,200

Population aging provides growing opportunities for intergenerational relationships.

While there are many contributing factors to population aging in Canada, declining fertility rates have played a role, according to Statistics Canada.

The fertility rate in 2013 was 1.59 children per woman, a rate that has hovered between 1.5 and 1.7 since the early 1980s but is far lower than the rate of 3.94 recorded in 1959 during the baby boom years.8 9

Fertility rates in 2013 varied from a low of 1.41 children per woman in British Columbia to a high of 3.04 in Nunavut.10 11

Compared with previous generations, a growing number of people in Canada are expected to reach seniorhood.

Women in Canada had an estimated 91% chance of reaching age 65 in 2010, up from 60% in 1925. This rate is projected to grow to 95% by 2075.12

Men in Canada had an estimated 87% chance of reaching age 65 in 2010, up from 57% in 1925. This rate is projected to grow to 93% by 2075.13
In 2016, there were fewer people in Canada about to join the labour market (4.3 million people aged 15 to 24) than people who were close to retirement (4.9 million people aged 55 to 64). Census data shows that for every two people about to retire, there is only one person joining the labour market.

Population aging in Canada has an impact not only on family relationships, but also on the social, economic, cultural and environmental contexts in which families live.

Grandparents in Canada had an average 4.2 grandchildren in 2011, down from 4.8 in 2001. This number will likely continue to decline as fertility rates continue to fall.17,18

In 2011, nearly 600,000 grandparents (8%) lived in the same household as their grandchildren.19

The share of grandparents living with grandchildren in Canada ranged from a low of 2.0% in Quebec to a high of 24% in Nunavut.20

There is a great deal of diversity among grandparents living with grandchildren, higher rates being found among recent immigrants21 (21%) and those reporting certain Aboriginal identities22 such as people reporting Inuit (22%) and First Nations (14%) identities.23

Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) grandparents living with their grandchildren also live with someone from the middle generation (nearly 512,000 grandparents).24

12% of grandparents who live with their grandchildren live in “skip-generation” households (nearly 73,000 grandparents), that is, homes consisting of grandparents and grandchildren without the presence of parents. There are more than 50,000 skip-generation households in Canada.25

4.8% of children aged 14 and under live with at least one grandparent (more than 269,000 children), up from 3.3% in 2001.26

There are nearly 363,000 multi-generational households (three or more generations) in Canada.27

1.3 million people in Canada lived in multi-generational homes in 2011, up from 930,000 in 2001 (a 40% increase).28

There is a great deal of diversity among grandparents living with grandchildren.

The labour market participation rate of seniors has more than doubled since 2000 (growing from 6.0% in 2000 to 13.7% in 2016).16

Population aging is having an impact on the labour market, since there are fewer people entering the labour market than those who are leaving through retirement.

In 2016, there were fewer people in Canada about to join the labour market (4.3 million people aged 15 to 24) than people who were close to retirement (4.9 million people aged 55 to 64). Census data shows that for every two people about to retire, there is only one person joining the labour market.
Family caregiving plays an important role in Canada’s aging population, and it can strengthen family relationships.

In 2012, there were 8.1 million family caregivers in Canada (28% of the population). This includes:

- 966,000 senior carers - 12% of caregivers
- 4,247,000 core working-aged (25 to 54) carers - 53% of caregivers
- 1,251,000 young carers (aged 15 to 24) - 15% of caregivers

More than 8 in 10 young carers (aged 15 to 29) say that their relationship with the care recipient strengthened during the caregiving period.

Research shows that family caregiving can enhance adolescent relationships, as it has been found to increase sibling activity/sharing and increase empathy toward older adults.

In 2012, age-related needs were identified as the single most common problem requiring help from caregivers (28%).

In 2011, 77% of grandparents rated their health as “good/very good/excellent” - up from 70% in 1985.

In 2012, four in 10 caregivers aged 15 to 29 reported their grandparent(s) as the primary care recipient.

Population aging has an impact on family finances, including (but not limited to) household finances and intergenerational transfers of wealth.

Approximately 6 in 10 surveyed boomer parents in Canada report providing financial assistance to their children.

An estimated $750 billion is expected to be transferred to Canadians aged 50 to 75 between 2016 and 2026.

Population aging has an impact on family finances, including (but not limited to) household finances and intergenerational transfers of wealth.

- 50% of grandparents living with their grandchildren reported in 2011 having financial responsibility in the household.

Rates were significantly higher for those living in skip-generation households (80%) or multi-generational households with a lone-parent middle generation (75%).

30% of surveyed boomers in Canada say they’re expecting to receive an inheritance from someone in their immediate or extended family.

37% of surveyed seniors in Canada say they plan on leaving an inheritance to a grandchild.

An estimated $750 billion is expected to be transferred to Canadians aged 50 to 75 between 2016 and 2026 - the “largest intergenerational wealth transfer in Canadian history” over such a period of time.

Approximately 1 in 4 surveyed boomer parents in Canada report having parents who require regular financial assistance.
Learn more about population aging and seniors in Canada:

- A Snapshot of Grandparents in Canada (resource)
- Seniors and Family Finances in Canada (fact sheet)
- Intergenerational Relations and Societal Change (Transition article)
- The “Oldest Old” Are Changing Canada (review)
- 50 Years of Families in Canada (timeline)
- Health, Wealth and Happiness: Dynamics of Families and a Good Old Age? (project page)
- Caregiving & Work (project page)
- Working Seniors in Canada (Fascinating Families)
- Grey Divorce (Silver Separations) (Fascinating Families)
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