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A SNAPSHOT OF FAMILY DIVERSITY IN CANADA

Statistical Snapshots
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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How to cite this document:
For more than 50 years, the Vanier Institute of the Family has monitored, studied and discussed trends in families and family life in Canada. From the beginning, the evidence has consistently made one thing clear: there is no single story to tell, because families are as diverse as the people who comprise them.

This has always been the case, whether one examines family structures, family identities, family living arrangements, family lifestyles, family experiences or whether one looks at the individual traits of family members, such as their ethnocultural background, immigration status, sexual orientation or their diverse abilities.

Parents, children, grandparents, great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins, friends and neighbours across the country all make unique contributions to our lives, our workplaces and our communities. They form the constellations of relationships that make up our families, which evolve as family members react and adapt to changing social, economic, cultural and environmental forces.

An inclusive definition of family is key to recognizing diversity

The Vanier Institute of the Family defines a family as any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement, and who together assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following:

- physical maintenance and care of group members;
- addition of new family members through procreation, adoption or placement;
- socialization of children and social control of family members;
- production, consumption, distribution of goods and services; and
- affective nurturance (i.e. love).1

This inclusive definition of family allows us to recognize, explore and discuss the high degree of diversity among (and within) families in Canada. It’s a functional definition that focuses on family roles and responsibilities, which can apply to all families regardless of their history, nationality, socio-economic status, ethno-racial background, sexual orientation or family type.

It’s a definition based on relationships, not the people who comprise these relationships – the focus is on function because families shape society because of what they do, not what they look like.

There is no single story of families in Canada.

Families and family households come in all shapes and sizes

In 2014, the fertility rate in Canada hit a record low 1.58 children per woman.

According to Statistics Canada, there were 9.8 million Census families living across Canada in 2016.2

In 2016, approximately half (51%) of the 8.2 million couples in Canada were living with children – down from nearly 57% in 2001, and the lowest level on record.3

In 2014, the fertility rate in Canada hit a record low 1.58 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 peak of Canada’s baby boom.4, 5

One of the impacts of reduced fertility is smaller family households across generations.6

According to Statistics Canada, there were 9.8 million Census families living across Canada in 2016.2

In 2016, the average number of persons per household in Canada was 2.4, down from 3.9 in 1961 and far lower than 5.6 recorded just after Confederation (1871).7

In 2016, 8% of homes contained five or more people – approximately one-quarter the share in 1961 (32%), although the decline has slowed significantly since 2001.8

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Family structures have become increasingly diverse

Family structures have become increasingly diverse throughout Canada’s history, with evolving trends of **coupling** (relationship formation, e.g. marriage, dating), **decoupling** (relationship dissolution, e.g. breakups, separation and divorce) and **recoupling** (engaging in new relationships, e.g. remarriage) shaping what families look like.

Research shows that marriage remains important to many Canadians, but fewer are getting married than in previous generations, and a growing share of those who do get married are doing so later in life.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1981</th>
<th>2016</th>
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<td>83%</td>
<td>66%</td>
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According to the 2016 Census, approximately 66% of all Census families in Canada included a married couple, down from 83% in 1981.

Consistent with historical trends, people living in Quebec are significantly less likely to be married than in the rest of the country: 60% of people in Quebec living in couples are married, compared with 84% across the rest of Canada.

According to the most recent data available (2008), the average age at first marriage in Canada has increased steadily across generations.

| Women married for the first time at 29.6 years of age in 2008, up from 22.2 in 1972. | 29.6 years |
| Men married for the first time at 31.0 years of age in 2008, up from 24.7 in 1972. | 31.0 years |

In 2017, less than half (46%) of Canadians aged 15 and older were married (and not separated), down from 61% in 1971.

Unlike the overall marriage trends in Canada, the number of same-sex couples getting married has increased significantly over the past decade, following the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005:

| 24,000 |

According to the 2016 Census, there were approximately 24,000 married same-sex couples in Canada, representing 33% of the all same-sex couples. This is up from 7,500 in 2006, when 16% of same-sex couples were married.

In 2016, approximately 18% of all Census families in Canada included a common-law couple, triple the rate in 1981 (6%).

Since common-law couples were first counted by Statistics Canada in 1981, Quebec has consistently had a higher share of its population living common-law. In 2016, 40% of people in Quebec living as part of a couple were living common-law, compared with 16% across the rest of Canada.

In 2016, approximately 16% of all Census families in Canada were lone-parent families, up from 11% in 1981 (rate has remained stable since 2001).

Historically, this rate has fluctuated, with the factors contributing to the prevalence of lone-parent families changing over time.

For example, the share of children aged 24 and under living with a lone parent was almost as high in 1931 (12%) as it was in 1981 (13%), but the circumstances differed:

In 1931, 76% of children in lone-parent families lived with a widowed parent, a share that dropped substantially to 24% by 1981.

In 1931, 24% of children in lone-parent families lived with a divorced/separated parent, a share that increased to 68% by 1981.

In 2016, nearly 8 in 10 lone-parent families (78%) were headed by women, a share that has remained stable over the past 50 years.

However, the growth in lone-parent families between 2011 and 2016 was higher among men (+7%) than women (+5.2%) – a trend also observed in the 2001-2006 and 2006-2011 intercensal periods.
Families in Canada have diverse family living arrangements

In 2016, there were nearly 518,000 stepfamilies in Canada, who accounted for 12% of couple families with children under 25.\textsuperscript{25, 26}

There are two types of stepfamilies counted in the Census: simple and complex. Simple stepfamilies are those in which “only one spouse has children who were born or adopted before the current union and are living in the household,”\textsuperscript{27} accounting for 61% of all stepfamilies in 2016. Complex stepfamilies are those in which “at least one parent has children from a previous union living in the household and there are also children born into the new union,”\textsuperscript{28, 29} accounting for 39% of all stepfamilies in 2016.

In 2016, there were nearly 404,000 multi-generational households (three or more generations living together) in Canada, accounting for 2.9% of all private households.

The number of multi-generational households grew by 38% since 2001, making them the fastest-growing household type across the country during this period.\textsuperscript{30}

Approximately 15% of children with an immigrant background lived in a multi-generational household in 2016, with the highest rate (18%) found among children born in Canada to two foreign-born parents.\textsuperscript{31}

Overall, Indigenous grandparents are more likely to live with their grandchildren than non-Indigenous grandparents, but there is diversity among this group:

| 22% | Inuk (Inuit) |
| 14% | First Nations |
| 5%  | Métis         |

22% of Inuk (Inuit) grandparents lived with their grandchildren in 2011. 14% of First Nations grandparents lived with their grandchildren in 2011. 5% of Métis grandparents lived with their grandchildren in 2011.

This compares with 3.9% among non-Indigenous grandparents that year.\textsuperscript{32}

In 2016, there were more than 30,000 children in Canada aged 0 to 14 living in skip-generation households, that is, living with grandparent(s) with no middle (i.e. parent) generation present.\textsuperscript{34}

In 2011, half (48%) of foster children in Canada were Indigenous.
Families are shaped by diverse identities, experiences and career environments

In 2016, 1.7 million people in Canada reported having an Aboriginal identity, accounting for 4.9% of the total population. This includes approximately:

- **First Nations**: 977,000 (58%)
- **Métis**: 588,000 (35%)
- **Inuk (Inuit)**: 65,000 (3.9%)
- **Other identity**: 23,000 (1.4%)
- **More than one identity**: 21,000 (1.3%)  

A full list of Aboriginal Ancestry Responses (e.g. Algonquin, Cree, Mi’kmaq, Ojibway) is available on the Statistics Canada website (link: http://bit.ly/2mOj7PU).

In 2016, there were nearly 73,000 same-sex couple families in Canada (0.9% of all couples), up 61% from 2006.

12% of same-sex couples are raising children (up from 8.6% in 2001), four-fifths of whom are female couples.

More than 10,000 children aged 0 to 14 are being raised by same-sex couples.

In 2016, 21.9% of people in Canada reported that they were born outside the country – up from 16% in 1961.

First-generation immigrants are projected to account for 25% to 30% of the population by 2036.

In 2016, approximately 38% of children aged 0 to 14 were foreign-born (first generation) or had at least one foreign-born parent (second generation). This is up from 35% in 2011, and is projected to reach 39% to 49% by 2036.

In 2016, approximately one-quarter (24%) of recent immigrants (arrived since 2011) were admitted under the family class of refugees to join family already in Canada, a rate that has remained fairly stable over the past 20 years.

In 2016, approximately 12% of recent immigrants to Canada (arrived since 2011) had been admitted as refugees.

In 2016, more than 1 in 5 people in Canada (22%) reported belonging to a visible minority group. Among this group, 3 in 10 were born in Canada.

In 2011, 20% of immigrants in Canada aged 15 to 64 reported belonging to a visible minority group, a share that is projected to grow to 35% to 40% by 2036.

In 2014, 4.6% of all couples in Canada were mixed unions, nearly double the rate from 1991 (2.6%). Statistics Canada defines a mixed union as “a couple in which one spouse or partner belongs to a visible minority group and the other does not, as well as a couple in which the two spouses or partners belong to different visible minority groups.”

In 2014, 1 in 5 Canadians aged 25 to 64 reported living with at least one disability. Disability rates were higher for women (23%) than men (18%). This includes Canadians living with a mental illness, who account for an estimated 1 in 5 people each year.

4 in 10 Canadians (38%) reported in 2012 that they have an immediate or extended family member living with a mental health problem. More than 1 in 5 (22%) had more than one family member with a mental health problem.

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Military and Veteran families have unique experiences resulting from shared work-family realities, including high mobility, extended and/or unexpected separation, risk and periods of transition between military and civilian life.

54,000

Canada is home to more than 54,000 military families. This includes approximately 40,000 Regular Force military families and 14,000 Reserve Force military families.49

49%

Nearly half (49%) of all Regular Force members and 20% of single Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members have children under 18 years of age.50

658,400

In 2017, there were an estimated 658,400 CAF Veterans in Canada.51

Nearly 4 in 10 (37%) of Regular Force Veterans have children under 18 years of age.52

102,000

In 2013, there were nearly 102,000 farm families53 in Canada, down from approximately 135,000 in 2003 (the number of farm families decreased every year during this decade).54

Polyamorous families also contribute to the diversity of Canada’s “family landscape” and have unique experiences. Polyamory is “the practice or condition of consensually participating in more than one intimate relationship at a time”55 (note: numbers are not available for polyamorous families in Canada at this time).

Many families in Canada identify with religion and spirituality

More than one-quarter (27%) of Canadians surveyed in 2014 said religion is “very important” in their lives.56

One-quarter of Canadians reported “no religious affiliation” in the 2011 Census (most recent data available), up from 17% in 2001.57

♀ 31%

♂ 26%

Approximately 3 in 10 Canadians (31% of women, 26% of men) reported attending a religious service at least once a month in 2008 (most recent data available).58

4 in 10

More than 4 in 10 Canadians (39% of women, 45% of men) reported attending NO religious services at all in 2008.59

Building on current data and trend analysis, this overview of families in Canada shows that diversity is, was and will continue to be a key characteristic of family life for generations to come – a reality that contributes to Canada’s dynamic and evolving society.

As former Governor General of Canada, His Excellency The Right Honourable David Johnston said at the Families in Canada Conference 2015,60 “Families, no matter their background or their makeup, bring new and special patterns to our diverse Canadian tapestry."
According to Statistics Canada, population aging has also contributed to this trend, since a larger share of seniors live alone compared with other age groups (link: http://bit.ly/2gaPPwv).


2 According to the 2011 General Social Survey, 56% of surveyed Canadians who had never been married said they intend to get married someday, though only the case for 10% of those who had been married before (link: http://bit.ly/16lB8vV).

3 Environics Analytics, 2017.


6 According to the 2011 General Social Survey, 56% of surveyed Canadians who had never been married said they intend to get married someday, though this is only the case for 10% of those who had been married before (link: http://bit.ly/16lB8vV).

7 Environics Analytics, 2017.


10 Environics Analytics, 2017.

11 Statistics Canada, “Marital Status and Opposite- and Same-Sex Status by Sex For Persons Aged 15 and Over Living in Private Households for Both Sexes, Total, Presence and Age of Children, 2016 Counts, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2016 Census - 100% Data.”

12 Environics Analytics, 2017.


14 Ibid.


16 Environics Analytics, 2017.


19 Ibid.

20 From Statistics Canada: “If both spouses have children from a previous union living in the household but not necessarily from the current union, this too is a complex stepfamily.” Link: http://bit.ly/lp7x5i.

21 Statistics Canada, Families, Households and Marital Status: Key Results from the 2016 Census.


24 Ibid.


26 Ibid.


32 Statistics Canada defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” Link: http://bit.ly/1gYqpc.


34 Statistics Canada, “Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity: Key Results from the 2016 Census.”


38 Problems with their emotions or mental health, or use of alcohol or drugs.


43 Mary Beth MacLean et al, 2015.

44 Farm families in the unincorporated sector.


50 Ibid.

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To learn more about families and family experiences in Canada, see our other *Statistical Snapshots* publications. This series brings together research and data from a variety of sources, providing readers with brief statistical analyses of families and family experiences in Canada. Beyond “just the facts,” *Statistical Snapshots* publications explore modern families and the social, economic, cultural and environmental contexts that shape family life in a simple and visually engaging format. This publication is designed for educators, students, journalists, social service professionals and anyone interested in understanding modern families and family experiences in Canada.

### A Snapshot of Grandparents in Canada
Canada’s grandparents are a diverse and evolving group, many of whom contribute greatly to family functioning and well-being in their roles as mentors, nurturers, caregivers, child care providers, historians, spiritual guides and “holders of the family narrative.” This edition of the Vanier Institute’s *Statistical Snapshots* series provides statistical analyses of grandparents in Canada and their evolving social and economic contexts.

### A Snapshot of Families and Food in Canada
A growing body of research shows that what families eat and how they eat can have an impact on individual and family well-being – eating patterns shaped by social, economic and cultural forces. This edition of the Vanier Institute’s *Statistical Snapshots* series explores families and food in Canada, including information on family meals, eating behaviours, nutrition, food security and more.

### A Snapshot of Military and Veteran Families in Canada
Canada’s military and Veteran families are diverse, resilient and strong, and they are a great source of pride for the country. They engage with – and play important roles in – their workplaces, communities and the country at large. This edition of the Vanier Institute’s *Statistical Snapshots* series provides information and insights about military and Veteran families in Canada.

### A Snapshot of Family Caregiving and Work in Canada
At some point in our lives, there is a high likelihood that each of us will provide care to someone we know – and receive care ourselves. Family members are typically the first to step up to provide, manage and sometimes pay for this care. This edition of the Vanier Institute’s *Statistical Snapshots* series highlights some of the family realities and trends that shape the “landscape of care” across the country.

### A Snapshot of Women, Work and Family in Canada
Over many generations, women in Canada have had diverse employment experiences that continue to evolve and change. This publication is a companion piece to the Vanier Institute’s *Fifty Years of Women, Work and Family in Canada* timeline, providing visually engaging data about the diverse work and family experiences of women across Canada.

### A Snapshot of Population Aging and Intergenerational Relationships in Canada
Canada’s population is aging rapidly, with a higher share of seniors than ever before. Using new statistics from the 2016 Census, this edition of the Vanier Institute’s *Statistical Snapshots* series explores the evolving demographic landscape across the country through a family lens.