Demographic Change in North America: Canada

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Intro: Canada Past, Present, and Future

Canada is the second largest country in the world in terms of land mass (i.e., after Russia). With a population of 40 million (Stats Canada, 2023, June 19), however, Canada's population is only slightly greater than that of California (Rose, 2022). In fact, the United States' population density (96 people/mi²) is over 8 times that of Canada's (11 people/mi²). A large majority of Canadians live within approximately 100 miles of its shared border with the United States in *census metropolitan areas*, or CMAs (e.g., Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver; Stats Can, 2023, January 11). Canada is a constitutional monarchy and a member of the Commonwealth of Nations—King Charles III is our titular head of state; Mary Simon is our Governor General (the King's representative in Canada); and Justin Trudeau is our elected Prime Minister (Government of Canada, 2022, October 20).

At the federal level, Canada is officially bilingual (French and English), although New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province (Rose & Humble, 2014). Quebec is officially a French-speaking province with provincial laws and programs designed to strengthen and promote the use of the French language. Nova Scotia has recently recognized Mi'kmaw as the province's first language as a step toward reconciliation with the Mi'kmaq people (Nova Scotia Premier's Office, 2022, July 17). Canada, described as a cultural mosaic with a patchwork family policy (Rose & Humble, 2014), has three distinct Indigenous groups representing a combined 5% of the population: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. As a step toward reconciliation (Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), Canada has recently passed the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* into law (i.e., DRIPA, June 21, 2021), upholding human rights of Indigenous peoples of Canada (Government of Canada, 2023, July 20). This past summer, the UN Declaration Act Action Plan was introduced in consultation with Indigenous peoples. September 30 is Canada's National Day of Truth and Reconciliation (Government of Canada, 2023, September 26).

Demographic Trends and Changes in Canada

By federal law, every year ending in 1 and 6, Statistics Canada conducts a national census (Stats Canada, 2015, December 30), with the next enumeration of the Canadian population scheduled for 2026. The primary goal of the census is to provide population and household counts for Canada's ten provinces and three territories. The census also provides key sociodemographic data about specific groups such as immigrants (23%; Stats Can, 2022, September 8), older Canadians (19%; Stats Can, 2023, August 16), and one-parent families (16%; Stats Can, 2022, July 13a). Since the first national census in 1871, census questions have regularly changed to reflect Canada's growing diversity. For example, in 1991, the Census asked about cohabitation for the first time (Stats Canada, 2015, December 30); in 2001, the Census asked about same-sex couples; in 2011, the census counted Canadian stepfamilies and foster families; and in 2021, the census asked about "sex at birth" and adult "gender," allowing Canada to count cis- (99.66%), and trans- and non-binary (.33%) individuals for the first time (Stats Canada, 2022, July 13b), half of which also have children.

Canada is not immune to worldwide demographic trends such as population aging, migration, and urbanization. This summer, Canada's population hit 40 million people (Stats Canada, 2023, June 19). Immigration has been the primary driver of population growth in Canada since the early 1990s, and this trend is projected to continue through 2041 (Stats Can, 2022, September 8). Meanwhile, Canada's birth rate (10.2 births/1000 population) continues to exceed its death rate (8.1 deaths/1000 population)—also known as *natural growth*, or births minus deaths—although at 1.33 children/woman (Stats Can, 2023, September 27), the current fertility rate is below *replacement level fertility* (i.e., 2.1 children/woman). Given a current life expectancy of 81.63 years (84.02 for females; 79.27 for males), Canada's population is aging (Stats Can, 2023, August 28) with obvious implications for the labour force and the health care system. More than 25% of Canadians are projected to be 65 years and older by 2068 (Stats Can, 2022, August 22). In 2021, there were almost 1 million Canadians 85 years and older; by 2068, that figure is projected to triple.

Nuptiality and Fertility Trends

Canada's crude marriage rate has been steadily dropping for 50 years (Stats Can, 2022, November 14). From a peak of 9.0 marriages/1000 population in 1972 when the Baby Boomers began marrying, to a pre-pandemic low of 3.9/1000 in 2019 (comparable to the G7 average), Canadians are less likely to marry than their parents and grandparents were (especially those living in Quebec). Furthermore, Canadians are marrying at later ages. In 1968, the average age at marriage was 25.6 years, and in 2018, the average age at marriage was 25.6 years, and in 2018, the average age at marriage was 35.3 years (or 31.7 for never-married Canadians). In 2021, 77% of Canadian couples were married; 23% were cohabiting (i.e., the G7 high), a rate driven largely by couples in Quebec where 43% cohabit (Stats Can, 2022, July 13b). In addition, approximately 1% of Canadian couples are same-sex, and of those, 33% were married (legalized nationally in 2005; Rose, 2022) as of 2016. Overall, according to Stats Canada (2022, December 12), Canadians are now more likely to say "I don't," than "I do."

Canada is considered to be a *low-fertility* country, or one that has a rate that is lower than the non-migration replacement level of 2.1 children per woman (Stats Can, 2022, May 16). Canada's pre-pandemic fertility rate was 1.47 children/woman; by 2022, Canada's fertility rate was 1.33 children/woman (with a high of 2.23 in Nunavut—our newest northern territory—and a low of 1.11 in British Columbia). Canada also has a higher than average age of mother at delivery: 31.3 years (Stats Can, 2023, September 27). Over the past two decades, women in their 20s are less likely to give birth, and women in their 30s are more likely to give birth; teenage girls are also less likely to give birth than they were 20 years ago. In 2021, 25% of mothers giving birth were 35 years and older (i.e., advanced maternal age), with increased risk for fetal and maternal complications (Stats Can, 2022, September 28). Due largely to higher fertility rates, the Indigenous population in Canada grew almost twice as much (+9.4%) as the non-Indigenous population (+5.3%) between 2016 and 2021 (Stats Can, 2023, June 21).

Care Arrangements: Children and Older Canadians

For decades, Canadians have called for a national childcare policy; one of the biggest obstacles, however, has been Canada's decentralized political structure with two levels of government (Rose & Humble, 2014): federal and provincial or territorial. Creating a national or federal policy is challenging when education, for example, falls under provincial/territorial jurisdiction. Quebec's family policy, and its \$7-a-day daycare (compared to \$61 per day in Toronto, \$56 per day in Vancouver) has been seen as a model for the rest of Canada (e.g., Fortin, 2017). Thus, beginning in 2021, the federal government, in agreement with the provinces and territories, created the *Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care* (i.e., CWELCC; Government of Canada, 2023, July 24) program. The goal is for Canada-wide \$10-a-day daycare by 2026, and increased numbers of daycare spaces, in part to provide children with a solid foundation for learning, but also to allow more Canadian women to enter or remain in the labour force.

In 2018, Canadians provided over 5 billion hours of unpaid care for seniors, with a paid replacement value of approximately \$100 billion a year (Fast et al., 2023). Fast and colleagues' secondary analysis of Canada's General Social Survey studied almost 5000 caregivers who care for a family member with a chronic health condition, a disability, or other aging challenges. Although 25% of working Canadians are providing care for an older family member (e.g., transportation, personal care, navigating services), caregiving responsibilities are not shared equally. Caregivers who provided the most care lived with the recipient of care (38% of

caregivers). Women (especially those born during the Baby Boom or earlier) were more likely than men to be caregivers, and those with incomes of less than \$75,000 CAD annually were more likely to be caregivers. Over 90% of Canadians 65 years and older still live independently in the community, although as they age, they are more likely to live in collective dwellings such as nursing homes (Stats Can, 2022, April 27b).

Health Trends and COVID-19

Significant health inequalities exist for Canadians living with lower SES, Indigenous peoples, and ethnic minorities, and this pattern was exacerbated during COVID-19 (Government of Canada, 2022, August 26). As in other countries, the burden of COVID-19 has been unequally distributed across Canadian communities. Men, Indigenous and ethnic minorities, people from lower-income neighbourhoods, residents of apartments, and older Canadians were more likely to be negatively impacted by COVID-19 (Stats Canada, 2022, August 30). Black men, especially those with a lower-income status, had a COVID-19 death rate (62 deaths/100,000 population) twice that of white Canadian men (28 deaths/100,000 population). In addition, residents of collective dwellings such as nursing homes were disproportionally affected: over 80% of COVID-19 deaths in 2020 were among Canadians 65+ years (PHAC, 2021). To date (Stats Can, 2023, October 11), 54,100 Canadians have died of COVID-19 (i.e., 1409 deaths/1 M population; Worldometer, 2023, October 14).

Canadians and Canada's health care systems have been negatively impacted by COVID-19. Initial reports highlighted stress and anxiety (e.g., increased gender-based domestic violence) and substance abuse (e.g., increased opioid-related deaths) among Canadians, as well as delayed or missed medical care such as cancer screening and elective surgeries (Canadian Medical Association, 2021). According to a Statistics Canada (2022, June 3) survey, 95% of health care workers (i.e., HCWs) reported that their jobs were affected by COVID-19, 85% reported that they felt more stressed at work, and 75% reported having an increased workload due to COVID-19. Furthermore, of nurses not yet intending to retire, 25% saw themselves leaving or changing jobs in the near future, as did 20% of HCWs in seniors' residences. COVID-19 has clearly contributed to a shortage of medical personnel including nurses and other health care workers. On a positive note, over 99 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered since December 14, 2020 (Government of Canada, 2023, September 15); on average, each Canadian has been vaccinated 2.5 times against COVID-19.

Aging Trends: An Aging Population

One effect of the COVID-19 pandemic was a slight drop in Canadian life expectancy (Stats Can, 2023, August 28). In 2019, life expectancy was 82.29 years at birth (84.37 for females; 80.18 for males). By 2021, life expectancy was 81.63 years at birth (84.02 for females; 79.27 for males). Although COVID-19 slowed population growth in Canada, it was not enough to halt population aging. Almost 20% of the Canadian population is now 65 and older (Stats Can, 2023, August 16). The number of Canadians 85 and older has doubled since 2001, and is expected to triple by 2068 (Stats Can, 2022, August 22). Over 2/3 of Canadians age 75+ live at home with their spouse (43%) or alone (28%) according to Stats Can (2021, May 26). A further 8% live with another family member, and 6% live in a multigenerational family. Fifteen percent of Canadians 75+ live in collective dwellings such as seniors' residences or long-term care facilities; 54% of those 100+ live in collective dwellings (Stats Can, 2022, April 27b).

Driven largely by the aging Baby Boomers (i.e., those born between 1946 and 1964), Canada is presently facing record retirements from an already aging labour force. As an example of the interaction between the aging population and labour force involvement, research about unpaid family caregiving is informative (Fast et al., 2023). As discussed above, women (at 14 hours of caregiving per week) are more likely than men (at 10 hours per week) to provide care for family members. Thus, women are more likely than men to miss paid work because of caregiving, reduce paid work because of caregiving, and leave paid work because of caregiving. Women (67%) are also more likely than men (33%) to claim federal *Compassionate Care Leave* benefits available to eligible employees (up to 55% of pre-leave salary).

Conclusion: Diversity and Resilience

How will Canada deal with its aging population and a rapidly shrinking labour force? Throughout and since the COVID-19 pandemic, federal and provincial policies have been aimed at getting Canadians back to work in order to address labour shortages especially those in our health care systems. Another strategy focusses on increasing immigration to Canada (e.g., Dubois, 2023, September 27) for the foreseeable future. Statistics Canada (2022, September 08) projects that by 2041, approximately 50% of the Canadian population will be immigrants and their Canadian-born children. Furthermore, by 2041, 25% of Canadians will be born in Asia or Africa, with Black immigrants more likely to live in Montreal (i.e., French-speaking Blacks from former French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean), South Asians more likely to live in Toronto, and Chinese immigrants more likely to live in Vancouver. Immigration will continue to be the main driver of population growth in Canada (Stats Can, 2022, August 22), and as a result, Canada will certainly need to address its housing shortages (CMHC, 2023, September 13) as well as ethnic and religious discrimination (e.g., hate crimes; Stats Can, 2022, August 3), both of which have worsened during COVID-19.

In fact, immigration has been described as "Canada's secret sauce," by Gerald Butts, vice chair of Eurasia Group, which conducts political risk assessments (BNN Bloomberg, 2023, January 4). Canada shows broad support for immigration across the political spectrum and throughout the population. Nevertheless, the regions differ with respect to immigration. Quebec, for example, passed law *Bill 96, An Act Respecting French* (Quebec, 2022) affirming that French is the official language of public administration, business, and education. Quebec also passed *Bill 21* (Quebec, 2019), about the secular nature of public service, prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols or clothing (e.g., hijabs) for those working as teachers, nurses, or

civil servants. Although these laws are designed to protect Quebec's language and values, they have implications for immigration; Quebec has limited the number of immigrants to 15% (Stats Canada, 2022, December 13) in part to assist immigrants integrating into Quebec society. In sum, Canadians of tomorrow will show greater diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, age, and gender—due largely to immigration and our aging population.

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