

**Statistics Canada**

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**Canadian 2006 Census of Population and  
Housing**

## Canadian 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Canada's next census will take place on May 16, 2006. For more than 300 years the census has been painting a picture of who we are as a nation and the communities where we live. The 2006 Census marks the first time that respondents can complete their questionnaire on-line.

### **Legal context**

The *British North America Act* of 1867, now called the *Constitution Act*, provided for changes in the representation of each province's seats in the House of Commons, based on the results of the 1871 Census and each subsequent decennial census. These decennial censuses were legislated to establish the boundaries of federal constituencies, thus ensuring fair representation by population. With the passage of the *Statistics Act* in 1918, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, now called Statistics Canada, was given responsibility for coordinating and producing most of Canada's statistics including the Census. The need for more up-to-date information became increasingly evident following the Second World War, with the industrialization of the Canadian economy, successive waves of immigration and a rapid growth in population. Therefore, in 1956, a quinquennial (mid-decade) census was added to the Census Program.

### **Content determination through consultation with data users**

Census data are integral to how the various levels of government direct the affairs of Canada. Each person counted in the census affects the distribution of annual transfer payments from the federal government to the provinces and territories. In turn, provinces and territories make grants to local and municipal governments based on population counts. Several pieces of legislation (e.g., the *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act*, the *Official Languages Act*, the *Canada Health Act*, the *Canada Pension Plan*, the *Old Age Assistance Act* and the *War Veterans Allowance Act*) prescribe procedures which refer to or require census data.

Census officials consult with major data users and conduct extensive testing before recommending the census questions to the federal Cabinet for consideration and approval. Statistics Canada evaluates each question with respect to importance, response burden, privacy and confidentiality considerations, costs, benefits, and how and why the information will be used. Statistics Canada also undertakes an extensive content testing program to ensure that new or modified census questions accurately produce the required information. After conducting the consultations and the testing, Statistics Canada makes its recommendations to Cabinet. Following Cabinet approval and prescription by the Governor in Council, the census questions are made public in the *Canada Gazette*, Vol. I.

More information on the consultation process can be found at the Statistics Canada website [www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca) by clicking on census on the home page and following the links to the 2006 Census.

### **Evolving methodology**

The duration of a quinquennial census cycle is usually seven to eight years. For the 2006 Census, the cost will range between \$555 and \$560 million Cdn for the overall cycle. Canada's population is about 32 million. The role of the Census Program organization is to establish the strategic direction for each census and determine the structure, methods and processes that will best support that direction.

A number of factors led Statistics Canada, for the 2006 Census, to consider moving away from the approach it had used successfully for five censuses. Chief among these were privacy concerns, in particular the issue of respondents knowing their local enumerator personally, and the physical security of completed questionnaires. In addition, there was concern that Canada's

Revenue Agency might not continue to have the capacity needed to key the census responses, so we needed to find a suitable and efficient replacement to manual keying. Another factor was the Government On-Line initiative, which stated that by 2005 all transactions that Canadians have with the federal government should be available online. Finally, recruitment and retention of enumerators also was a problem in the 2001 Census that seemed likely to persist.

The Census in Canada will continue to be a “traditional census” in 2006, meeting the four essential features of a population census (individual enumeration, universality within a defined period, simultaneity and defined periodicity). In particular, a census form will be delivered to every dwelling, completed by every resident of that dwelling, and returned to Statistics Canada for capture and processing. Statistics Canada will continue to use sampling to reduce respondent burden, such that a long form (with 53 questions) will be delivered to 1/5 of dwellings, and a much shorter form (having eight questions) will be delivered to 4/5 of dwellings.

The changes introduced in the 2006 Census methodology include:

- ⇒ Delivery of forms by Canada Post wherever feasible (just over 2/3 of dwellings), and drop-off by an enumerator for the remainder;
- ⇒ Centralizing the return of questionnaires to one national Data-Processing Centre, meaning reduced contact by local enumerators (to reduce privacy concerns);
- ⇒ an Internet Option (Statistics Canada will offer this option in most areas across the country);
- ⇒ Automated character-recognition technology as an alternative to manual keying;
- ⇒ a smaller workforce (the new methodology will significantly reduce our dependence on temporary employees);
- ⇒ improved timeliness of results (the proposed methodology will permit earlier data releases);
- ⇒ centralized telephone follow-up for failed edit cases (to improve respondent privacy);
- ⇒ expansion of automated coding of written responses into standard classification codes to all such questions (including, for the first time, Industry and Occupation).

Given the scale of the changes introduced in 2006, the amount of systems development work required and the limited resources available internally to do all this development, Statistics Canada concluded that a component of the software development and hardware acquisition work would best be contracted out to private industry. The systems development for all the data capture and related processes including coding, automated edits, Internet response and CATI for direct response and failed edit follow-up were contracted out as a single package. Because of the critical importance of the quality of the printed questionnaires for efficient and accurate optical data capture, the printing and assembly of the questionnaire packages was also included.

More information on the 2006 Census including changes to the methodology can be found at the Statistics Canada website [www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca) by clicking on census on the home page and following the links to the 2006 Census.

### **Data Dissemination**

The comprehensive nature of the Census questionnaire provides for a wealth of detailed socio-economic information on Canadians, available for small geographic levels. With the 2001 Census the Internet has become the dominant method for product line delivery and promoting awareness of census data availability. As well, more census data than ever before are being made available free to the general public. In 2001, there was also extensive collaboration between Statistics Canada and the media, resulting in increased and more in-depth media coverage of the results.

2001 Census data, analysis and maps can be found at the Statistics Canada website [www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca) by clicking on census on the home page.