



Canada's Vital Signs 2009: Executive Summary

The past year was one of profound economic change that did and continues to deeply affect Canadians and their quality of life from coast to coast. It's important to take stock of where we find ourselves right now, but it's also necessary to be aware of how recent changes impact the course of longer-term societal trends. Only by understanding both can we hope to influence the road ahead.

Canada has experienced rapid and ongoing fallout from the onset of a global economic recession in late 2008. The economic downturn erased hundreds of thousands of jobs, taking its worst toll on already disadvantaged, young and new Canadian workers.

At the same time, long-term inequities that pre-date the recession could worsen as a result of it. The gap between high and low income earners continues to grow. Aboriginal children lack the health care and educational supports that other Canadian children have to ensure their healthy growth and development. The statistics below, collected as part of *Canada's Vital Signs 2009*, provide us with a snapshot of how our country, and our communities, are faring. One national indicator is chosen for each of the 10 Vital Signs issue areas. Each issue area represents a key aspect of what goes into building a vital, resilient community. For more detail see our [Research Findings](#).

- **Canada's employment rate has risen and fallen dramatically in recent months**, setting a new high of 63.8 per cent in February 2008, but falling to 61.4 per cent by August of this year, erasing gains made in employment participation over the previous seven years.
- **Disproving the notion that 'a rising tide lifts all boats,' income inequality in Canada has grown over the past 25 years, through both bad and good economic times.** To illustrate: In 1980, a family at the 90th percentile of the income distribution earned 15 times the income of a family at the 10th percentile. By 2000, a 90th percentile family earned 32 times as much as a 10th percentile family.¹
- **For young workers, the recession has made the job of finding a job even tougher.** Youth unemployment rose from 10.7 per cent in January 2008 to 16.6 per cent by this summer.
- **More Canadian babies are born at low birth weight, not because they are too small for their age – they're just born too early.** Between 2002 and 2008, the incidence of low birth weight in Canada increased from 5.7 per cent to 6.1 per cent, in large part due to a rising incidence in pre-term births linked to the increase in maternal age, C-sections and fertility treatments.

- **Especially on reserves and in Nunavut, Aboriginal students are attending and completing high school at much lower rates than the non-Aboriginal population.** In 2006 only 39.3 per cent of Inuit Canadians (15 and over) and 40.5 per cent of Aboriginal Canadians on reserve had completed high school. This compares to a non-Aboriginal high-school completion rate of 76.9 per cent and the completion rate of Aboriginal Canadians overall at 56.3 per cent.
- **While current economic flux may bring some improvement, so far this decade, housing has become less and less affordable.** In 2000 the average home price in Canada equalled 3.23 times the average pre-tax income. By 2006, this multiple had risen to 4.35 times and in some cities, it's over 5.0 times median family pre-tax income.
- **Canada's safety record continues to improve.** Violent crime has fallen 12 per cent since 1991 with the largest declines in the most violent offences. This includes a 32 per cent drop in homicides, a 36.4 per cent decrease in sexual offences and a 64.5 per cent decline in abductions.
- **For the vast majority of Canadians, recycling has become second nature.** In 2007, 98 per cent of Canadians with access to a recycling program were taking part.
- **Canada's charities depend on fewer donors, making bigger donations.** While the median charitable donation increased from \$170 in 1997 to \$250 in 2007, the proportion of Canadians declaring charitable donations dropped from 25.7 per cent to 24.0 per cent over the same decade.
- **Incomes of Canada's arts and culture professionals are decreasing, especially among Canada's self-employed artists.** In 2005, the median earnings of full-time, full-year workers in professional occupations in arts and culture were \$44,010, down slightly from \$44,823 in 2000.ⁱⁱ But earnings among the artist occupations, especially among self-employed artists, declined more significantly.

ⁱ http://www.growinggap.ca/files/Canadas%20Rich%20and%20Poor_1.pdf

ⁱⁱ <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/highlights/earnings/Table801.cfm?SR=1>