

Research Findings

The Gap Between Rich and Poor

Any way you measure it, child poverty in Canada persists at levels Canadians find unacceptable. *Poverty is typically measured in two ways. The Low Income Cut-off (LICO) measures the proportion of the population who spend more than ²/₃ of their income on basic needs: food, shelter and clothing. The Low Income Measure (LIM) determines relative poverty: the proportion of the population whose income is less than half the median income.*

In 1989 when the House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution seeking to eliminate poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000, the rate of child poverty was 15.1% (LICO before tax). By 2000, that rate had *increased* to 18.1% ¹. Most recent figures remind us how little progress we've made. In 2006, the child poverty rate stood at 15.8%; higher than when the resolution was passed. Measured after tax, its virtually unchanged since 1989, meaning that more than 700,000 Canadian children are still living below the low-income cutoff.

Using the Low Income Measure of relative poverty, the situation is even worse. In 2006, over 1.6 million Canadian children (23.1%) lived in families below the LIM poverty line (before tax). ² Measured after tax to account for the redistributive effects of our tax system, the LIM rate goes down to 19.6% - still representing one in five Canadian children. ³

1. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-I-2-c-ii.pdf>
2. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-I-3-a.pdf>
3. Statistics Canada: CANSIM Table 111-0015 and 202-0802

Safety

Although Canadians are driving more, our roads are getting safer. Traffic crimes, particularly offences of impaired driving, failure to remain or stop at the scene of an accident and driving while prohibited have fallen dramatically over the past 15 years and now register at less than half the rate of traffic crime seen in 1991. ¹ On average across the country in 2007, there were 400 criminal code traffic offences per 100,000 people. In 1991, the rate stood at 806 offences per 100,000. In Red Deer, Alberta, traffic crime has dropped more than 80% since 1991 (3,220 per 100,000), but at 535 offences per 100,000 in 2007, traffic offences there were still higher than the



national average. Ottawa in 2007 hit its highest level of traffic crime in 15 years, but at 302 offences per 100,000 was still well below the national average.⁵

4. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-II-3.pdf>
5. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-II-3.pdf>

Health

Every year, more Canadians become obese. Obesity is one of the leading causes of heart disease, stroke and Type 2 diabetes and increases risk for numerous other health conditions, including high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, breast and colon cancer and depression.⁶ According to the 2007 Canadian Community Health Survey, four million Canadian adults or 16% of all adults are obese. Another eight million adults or 32% are overweight.⁷ Canadians' rate of obesity, measured through self-reporting of height and weight to calculate body mass index, has grown steadily over the past decade. Slightly more men (17.1%) than women (15%) are obese and prevalence is greatest (19%) among those aged 45-64 years.⁸ Obesity rates vary quite significantly across the country from a high of 22% in Newfoundland to a low of 11.5% in British Columbia.⁹ It's worth noting that because of the tendency of survey respondents to over-report their height and under-report their weight, it's likely that actual obesity rates are higher than estimated.

6. [Physical Activity For Health: The Evidence, Public Health Agency of Canada - Healthy Living Unit](#)
7. [Canadian Community Health Survey 2007](#)
8. [Statistic Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey](#)
9. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-III-3.pdf>

Learning

More Canadians are finishing high school. In 2007, 22.2% of Canadians, aged 15 and over, did not have a high school diploma.¹⁰ This has improved significantly since 1990 when 37.8% of Canadians, aged 15 and over, had not completed high school.¹¹ And progress has occurred right across the country. Of concern however, is a discernable gender gap. While older age groups reflect the tendency for more men than women to complete high school, today the situation has reversed. Among younger adults, aged 25-44, the share of men without a high school education is more than 30% higher than that of women.¹²

10. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-IV-3-a.pdf>
11. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-IV-3-a.pdf>
12. Calculated by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards from Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey data

Housing

In some communities, a vacant apartment can be very hard to find. Availability of rental housing fluctuates across the country as Canadians move with employment opportunities.¹³ Among Vital Signs communities in 2007, vacancy rates for 2-bedroom apartments ranged from 7.1% in Fredericton to under 0.5% in Sudbury, and Victoria. The national average was 2.6%.¹⁴

13. [Rental Market Report Canada Highlights, Spring 2008, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation](#)
14. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-V-3.pdf>

Getting Started

Immigrants' incomes are falling farther behind. While the real median income of non-immigrant Canadian families increased by 5.3% from 2000 to 2005, the income of immigrant families fell by 1%. Among recent immigrants (those in Canada less than five years) incomes fell 3.2%.¹⁵

And the gap in earnings between those who were born in Canada and those born elsewhere is growing. In 2000, the difference between the median income of immigrants, who have been in Canada more than five years, and that of non-immigrants was only 2.5%.¹⁶ By 2005, the difference had grown to 8.3%, raising doubt over whether earnings will even out over time. With the exception of St. John's, where immigrants' incomes are more than a third higher than non-immigrants, this growing disparity could be seen in all Vital Signs communities.

Recent immigrants fare much worse. On average, recent immigrants' incomes in Canada were 35% lower than those of non-immigrants. Put another way, for every dollar that a non-immigrant earned, a recent immigrant earned 65 cents. In Canada's largest cities recent immigrants' incomes were half the median income of non-immigrant families – in Toronto, 50%, in Montreal, 51.1% and in Vancouver, 51.8%. And, with the exception of Guelph, Vancouver and Victoria, all Vital Signs communities and national averages showed signs of growing disparity between the incomes of recent immigrants and non-immigrants from 2000 to 2005.¹⁷

15. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-VI-3-b.pdf>
16. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-VI-3-b.pdf>
17. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-VI-3-b.pdf>



Arts and Culture

Canadians' interest in the performing arts is bouncing back. Canada's arts and cultural sector contributes billions of dollars to the nation's economy and employs over half a million people. But a recent study found that the arts may also strengthen our social fabric.¹⁸ Across a number of social indicators, it was found that those who attend live performing arts events (including theatre, popular music, classical music, dance or opera) reported a stronger sense of social engagement than those who do not attend. They volunteer and donate money at much higher rates, get involved with neighbours and clubs more and rate their own health higher than non-attendees do. 41.2% of Canadian adults reported attending a live arts performance in 2005, up from 37.6% in 1998 and approaching the rate of participation reported in 1992 (42.4%).¹⁹

18. [Social Effects of Culture: Exploratory Statistical Evidence, Hill Strategies Research Inc., March 2008](#)

19. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-VII-3.pdf>

Environment

It's estimated that this year, 21,000 Canadians will die from the effects of air pollution.²⁰ And, according to the Canadian Medical Association, the numbers will only increase in coming years if air quality is not improved. Increased concentrations of ground-level ozone (mostly from vehicle exhaust and industrial emissions) and tiny particulate matter both diminish air quality and pose long-term and acute risks to our health. This year, over 92,000 emergency department visits and almost 11,000 hospital admissions are expected across the country resulting from exposure to air pollution. Of the almost 2,700 people estimated to die this year due to acute short-term exposure to air pollution, over 80% will be seniors. Air quality and resulting health risk is worst in central Canada (Ontario and Quebec) where communities report the most days with concentrations of ground-level ozone and tiny particulate matter exceeding Canada-wide standards.²¹

20. [No Breathing Room: National Illness Costs of Air Pollution, Canadian Medical Association, August 2008](#)

21. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-VIII-3-a.pdf>



Work

Employment is growing across the country, especially in the West. Over the past 20 years, Canada has enjoyed strong employment growth, averaging 1.6% since 1987 and adding approximately 4.5 million jobs over the period.²² With an average annual growth rate of 1.9% since 2000, Canada's employment has grown faster than any other G7 country.²³

From 2000-2007, employment grew by 14.2% across the Canada. From 200-2007, explosive job growth took place in Calgary (25.6%) and Red Deer (33.3%). Fredericton also experienced significant employment growth of 22.3% in the same period.²⁴

22. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-IX-3-a.pdf>

23. Calculated by Centre for the Study of Living Standards from data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

24. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-IX-3-a.pdf>

Belonging and Leadership

Even in communities with the highest turnout, over a quarter of Canada's listed voters don't vote – in some communities it's closer to half. Since 1988, voter turnout in federal elections has steadily fallen in Canada from an average of about 75%, in the period following World War II, down to 64.7% in the last federal election (2006). Among Vital Signs communities, Oakville (Ontario) led participation at 73.9% while Medicine Hat (Alberta) brought up the rear at 56.3%.²⁵

While identifying a clear link between age and voter turnout, Elections Canada, in a 2003 study also found "people are less likely to cast a ballot if they feel they have no influence over government actions, do not feel voting is an essential civic act, or do not feel the election is competitive enough to make their votes matter to the outcome." Voting rates, they project, are likely to continue falling.²⁶

25. <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/rpt2008/table-X-3.pdf>

26. [Explaining the Turnout Decline in Canadian Federal Elections: A New Survey of Non-voters, Elections Canada March 2003](#)