



Taking the Pulse of Canadian Community Foundations

Each fall, Canadian community foundations from the Atlantic to the Pacific prepare local report cards for, and about, their communities. Like an annual check-up, each Vital Signs report looks at how one community is doing across many aspects of quality of life. Vital Signs monitors change, informs needed action and celebrates signs of community health.

What makes for 'good' quality of life varies from one community to another just as surely as Canada's varied peoples, geography and even weather shape so much of our daily realities.

While some communities are concerned about attracting more residents, others worry about how to integrate so many newcomers. Some face the challenge of increasing birth rates, while others are dealing with the impacts of a rapidly aging population. Some are facing economic hard times while others contend with keeping pace with rampant growth.

Each Vital Signs report reflects this diversity, tracking the measures that are important to its community. Measures as varied as tons of food-producing sea life, number of boil-water advisories, distance to buy fresh food and proportion of kids with weapons are examples of statistics that reflect local concerns. They provide the information residents need to take action to improve their own community's quality of life.

But alongside such diverse local priorities, runs the thread of shared concerns - issues that are important to all Canadians. To capture these issues, we offer *Canada's Vital Signs*.

Different Perspectives on Community Vitality

Collected from the 'street level' view provided by local reports, *Canada's Vital Signs* zooms out to report on issues that all of the local communities agree are a priority:

- The Gap Between Rich and Poor
- Safety
- Health
- Learning
- Housing
- Getting Started in Canada
- Arts and Culture
- Environment
- Work
- Belonging and Leadership

This 'aerial' view provides the opportunity to more clearly identify shared problems and progress and to spot regional variations. Looking at leading indicators from local and national perspectives helps community foundations and those we support place ourselves and our communities in a



larger context. By sharing and comparing we all gain understanding of the problems other communities are facing and learn from those that have overcome the challenges we confront.

FINDINGS SNAPSHOT

What Have We Found?

- **Canada is making progress, but not enough, to eliminate child poverty.** In 2006, 1.6 million Canadian children - more than one in five (23%) lived in poverty. In 2000, more than one in four children (26%) lived in low-income families. Child poverty in 2006 was at virtually the same level as in 1989, the year when Canada's House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution to eliminate it by the year 2000. At the current rate, it would take 43 more years or until 2050 to eliminate child poverty.
- **Immigrants' incomes are falling farther behind.** While the median income of non-immigrant Canadian families increased by over 5% from 2000 to 2005, the income of immigrant families fell by 1%. Among recent immigrants (those in Canada less than five years) incomes fell more than 3%.
- **More Canadians are finishing high school, but there are some disturbing gaps.** In 2007, just over 22% of Canadian adults did not have a high school diploma. This has improved steadily since 1990 when almost 38% had not completed high school. This put Canada third among G8 countries, behind Russia and the United States. However, among Canadians aged 25-44, the share of men without a high school education (11%) is markedly higher than that of women (8%). And in 2006, 43.7 per cent of aboriginal people did not have a high school diploma.
- **Every year, more Canadians become obese.** In 2007, 16% of Canadians were obese – a rate that has grown steadily since 1996, when the obesity rate was 12%. (Obesity defined as adult body mass index 30 or higher)
- **It's estimated that 21,000 Canadians will die from the effects of air pollution this year.** Air quality 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.
- **Although Canadians are driving more, our roads are getting safer.** Traffic crime (Criminal Code offences such as impaired or dangerous driving) rates have fallen steadily over the past 15 years and are now less than half of what they were in 1991. In 2007, there were 400 criminal code traffic offences per 100,000 people, down from 806 in 1991.
- **Employment grew over the past five years, especially in the West.** The 2000 to 2007 period saw an average annual employment growth of 1.92 per cent across the country. Strong economies in Alberta and British Columbia fuelled very strong growth while other regions experienced more modest growth.
- **In some communities, a vacant apartment can be very hard to find.** While in 2007 the national vacancy rate averages around 2.5%, it's less than 0.5% in Sudbury, Lethbridge and Victoria.
- **Canadians are showing increasing interest in the arts.** About 41% of Canadian adults reported attending a live arts performance in 2005, up from 38% in 1998.

This is a section of *Canada's Vital Signs 2008*

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- **Participation rates in democracy and elections are declining. Even in communities with the highest turnout, over a quarter of Canada's listed voters don't show – in some communities it's closer to half.** Just over 64% of listed voters cast a ballot in the last federal election (2006), continuing a declining trend in voter turnout that began in the 1990s. Previously, federal elections dating back to 1962 routinely saw voter turnout rates in the range of 70% to 80%. Among Vital Signs communities in 2006, Oakville (Ontario) led participation at 74% while Medicine Hat (Alberta) trailed at 56%.

More detailed findings, with links to sources, can be found in the [Research Findings](#) section.