

# NATIONAL CENSUS 2021: COUNT YOURSELF IN



It's already been delivered to your mailbox or front door: a letter from **Statistics Canada** about the 2021 Census of Population. May 11, 2021 was Census Day across Canada and all Canadians are being asked to count themselves in. That includes YOU.

## WHAT IS A CENSUS?

The word “census” comes from the Latin word *censere*, meaning “to assess.” Canada’s census is a nationwide survey conducted every five years. It collects **demographic** information on every person in Canada.

Census information provides a snapshot of the country’s population. By comparing one census to the next, analysts can see how Canada is changing.

## HOW IT WORKS

Every Canadian household received a census package on or just after May 3. However, since Statistics Canada wants to encourage people to complete the census questionnaire online,

most homes didn't actually receive a paper copy of the questions. Instead, they received a letter explaining how to respond online or, if they prefer, they can have a paper copy mailed to them. One adult in each household is required to fill in the census questionnaire about all of the people who live at that address.

Most households are being asked to complete the short form census which asks ten basic questions about age, sex, marital status, relationship to others in the household, and language.

One in four homes completes the long form census. This questionnaire has more than 60 questions. It collects detailed social and economic information about the people living in the home and their role in the community. It asks about cultural background, spoken languages, family relationships, and childcare. It covers schooling, employment, income, ability, housing, and transportation.

Many of the questions stay the same from census to census; this allows

## OUR FAR-REACHING CENSUS

Canada’s first census was conducted in 1871.

Today, our census encompasses an area of more than 9.2 million square kilometres and over 15 million households. Questionnaires are sent to Canadians working for the federal government overseas, as well as to Canadian embassies and Armed Forces personnel.

Census questions have been translated online into 31 other languages – 20 ethnic languages and 11 Indigenous languages. However, the questions must be answered in English or French.

researchers to compare data across several decades. One of the questions even asks permission for the data to be made publicly available 92 years later.

However, each census some new questions are added. For the first time, this year's census includes questions

## DEFINITIONS

**DEMOGRAPHY:** the study of the characteristics of human populations, such as size, growth, density, distribution, and vital statistics

**STATISTICS CANADA:** Canadian federal government agency commissioned with producing statistics to help better understand Canada, its population, resources, economy, society, and culture



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to count transgender Canadians, veterans, active military personnel, people who have minority language rights, Inuit enrolled in land claims, and members of Métis groups. It also includes new questions aimed at learning how people commute to work using public transportation, and why Canadians work part-time or seasonally.

The completed forms are entered into a database by Statistics Canada. All of the information about Canadians is sorted and **cross-referenced**. Analysts then extract useful statistics from the data, such as the number of school-aged children in Regina in 2020.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In early 2021, Canada's population was just over 38 million.

## WHY CONDUCT A CENSUS?

The government isn't just being nosy when it asks these questions. Census information is vital for future planning and decision making. We all use public services such as schools, hospitals, emergency services, and roads. Census data is used to decide where these services are needed most.

The health care industry uses the data to forecast needs and costs. Using previous census numbers and projecting into the future, Statistics Canada has determined that the proportion of the population aged 65 and over will triple between 1976 and 2051. The proportion of seniors over 80 is growing particularly fast. That's important information to know, with huge implications.

"The cost of an elderly population is very, very substantial. One of the reasons why health care costs are always going up is that the population that is most dependent or most needy of health care is always going up as well and will continue to go up," said Dr. David Ley, a geography professor at the University of British Columbia.

## MORE USES

The federal government uses census data to determine the boundaries of federal electoral districts. Each district, or riding, elects one federal Member of Parliament so, to be fair, the population of each district is reviewed after each census and boundaries are adjusted to maintain balance. Information from the 2011 census resulted in the creation of 30 new electoral districts, increasing the number of federal MPs from 308 to 338.

The federal government also uses the census to determine the amounts of transfer payments to the provinces. That's money the provinces use to fund health care and other social services.

Businesses, the media, industry, and universities use this information, too, for everything from research to choosing locations for offices and stores.

## IT'S THE LAW

Every household in Canada is required to complete the questionnaire. The penalty for refusing ranges from fines to jail time.

Some people believe that the government has no business asking personal questions. They worry about how the information will be used.

## A CENSUS DURING A PANDEMIC

Statistics Canada had considered delaying the census until 2022 due to public health concerns related to the pandemic. However, there will be a range of different COVID-19 safety protocols in place for the enumerators who show up to a dwelling in person.

"We planned for this reality," said census director general Geoff Bowlby. "We planned right from the start to operate within the confines of a pandemic."

All staff collecting census information in person are expected to observe physical distancing, stay outdoors, and use personal protective equipment.

Statistics Canada expects nine out of 10 households will complete the census online or by phone – the same percentage as in 2016. And officials hope that despite the pandemic, the census response rate for 2021 will match the response rate of 98.3 percent in 2016, as anything less than 98 percent could compromise the quality of the data.

However, confidentiality and privacy are protected by law. Census data is never attached to a name or address in any database, so no one can be identified. And the information collected must be clearly in the public interest, and not obtainable from other sources. ★

## DEFINITIONS

**CROSS-REFERENCE:** to compare or link one part of a book, index, catalogue, or file to another part containing related information