
Feature Article: Where do the young and old live?

The population of the province is generally aging, although strong migration to British Columbia both international and inter-provincial has been slowing down this process, as migrants are generally younger than the rest of the population. The 1996 Census now gives us a snapshot of the age structure in different parts of the province.

Between 1991 and 1996 there was strong growth in all age segments of the provincial population. However, the 24% growth in the older working-age population (ages 45-64) was almost double the gain in any of the other main population segments, as seniors (ages 65 and over) increased 13%, children (under 15 years) increased 11% and the younger working-age population (ages 15-44) increased 10%. These different growth patterns resulted in the older working-age group increasing from 20% of the population to almost 22% between 1991 and 1996. The seniors share remained virtually unchanged at 13% of the population, while the younger working-age group declined to under 46% of the population and children decreased to under 20%.

It is worth noting that the use of age 64 as the upper limit to the working age population is for convenience. In fact, the age at which people move from working to being retired has become more variable.

Regional Districts

Which parts of the province have the largest concentration of the different age groupings? The patterns are quite different between the northern and southern parts of the province, as factors such as the availability of different types of jobs, services required by different age groups, climate and so on play a role in the suitability of an area for people of different ages. Among the 28 regional districts Okanagan-Similkameen is the one with the largest share of seniors (24% of its population), followed by Capital,

Nanaimo and Sunshine Coast. At the other extreme, only 2% of the Fort Nelson-Liard population, 4% of Mount Waddington and 5% of the Stikine region are seniors.

The distribution of the working-age population differs quite dramatically between the 45-64 and 15-44 age groups. Powell River, Sunshine Coast and Stikine have 25% of their population in the older group, while Fort Nelson-Liard has only 14% of its population in this group, followed by Peace River and Squamish-Lillooet with 18%. On the other hand, both Fort Nelson-Liard and Squamish-Lillooet have 55% of their population in the younger working-age group. At the other end of the spectrum are Okanagan-Similkameen with 35% and Sunshine Coast with 38% of their population in the younger group.

Fort Nelson-Liard has the largest concentration (29%) of children under 15, followed by other northern parts of the province - Bulkley-Nechako, Central Coast, Kitimat-Stikine and Peace River. The two regions with the highest concentration of seniors, Capital and Okanagan-Similkameen, have only 17% of their population under the age of 15.

Municipalities

At the time of the 1996 Census there were 150 incorporated municipalities in the province. Since the 1991 Census three new municipalities were formed, Langford and Highlands in the Capital Regional District, and Lake Country in the Central Okanagan, and Matsqui and the District Municipality of Abbotsford amalgamated to form the City of Abbotsford. Municipalities range in size from the City of Vancouver with over half a million people to municipalities that have a population of less than 1,000. The following information will generally relate to places with more than 1,000 people.

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There are a number of municipalities that have traditionally had high concentrations of seniors. This has not changed dramatically in 1996 but Qualicum Beach, with 34% of its population 65 years of age and over, has replaced White Rock as the place with the largest proportion of seniors. In 1996 Keremos, Osoyoos, Sidney, Oliver and White Rock also have more than 30% of their population in the senior ranks. At the other extreme, Tumbler Ridge has less than 1% of its population in the senior group and Mackenzie, Whistler and Gold River are all under 2%.

Although a number of small communities have larger shares of their population between the ages of 45 and 64, North Saanich with 31% and West Vancouver with 30% also have significant numbers of people in this age group. All municipalities in the province have at least 12% of their population in this group and as more of the baby boomers enter this group it will continue to grow in importance.

1996 Age Structure				
Municipality	Per Cent			
	<15	15-44	45-64	65+
Oldest				
Qualicum Beach	12.6	25.4	27.6	34.4
Keremeos	13.5	27.9	24.5	34.1
Osoyoos	11.5	26.4	28.7	33.4
Sidney	14.1	32.3	20.9	32.6
Oliver	15.9	29.2	23.5	31.4
White Rock	9.6	34.8	24.4	31.1
Youngest				
Telkwa	31.6	49.8	12.2	6.3
Taylor	28.8	50.5	16.3	4.3
Tumbler Ridge	28.7	54.8	15.6	0.9
Chetwynd	28.2	53.9	14.2	3.7
Fort Nelson	27.6	57.6	12.7	2.0
British Columbia	19.7	45.7	21.8	12.8

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 Census

The large share of people in the younger working-age group in Squamish-Lillooet and Fort Nelson-Liard regional districts noted

above reflects the dominance of this age group in Whistler (73%), Pemberton (59%) and Fort Nelson (58%). The resort nature of Whistler gives it a very different age profile than other communities.

A number of northern communities have the highest proportion of children: Telkwa (32%), Taylor and Tumbler Ridge (29%) and Chetwynd (28%). Communities with relatively few children are in many cases those with a large share of seniors, such as White Rock, Osoyoos and Qualicum Beach.

Data on mobility and migration from the 1996 Census, which will be available next year, will provide information on how these factors have influenced population growth and the age structure of different parts of the province.

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