

Business Indicators ♦ January 2007

The Dynamics of Population Ageing in B.C. – A Pig in a Python?

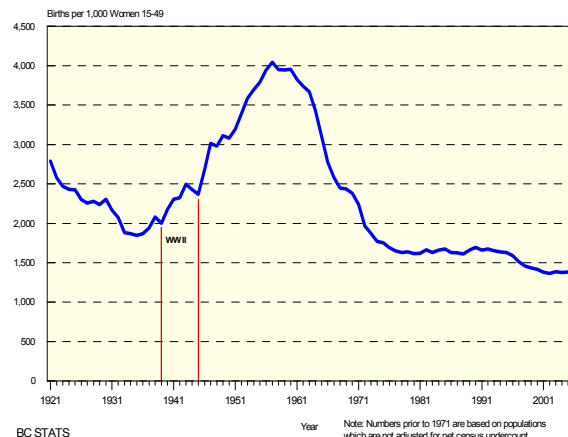
Population ageing is the process by which seniors become a progressively larger share of the total population. It was one of the most significant features of the British Columbia population during the twentieth century, and it will continue to make itself felt well into the twenty first. This shift in age structure will impact a broad range of social, economic and political conditions. It will continue to affect everything from government policy and the distribution of public resources to how we spend our leisure time.

Population ageing was largely caused by a sustained decline in fertility levels. As women began having fewer children, the proportion of children in the population began to decline. The post-war Baby Boom slowed this process for a while, as higher fertility rates during that time period boosted the number of children in the population relative to other age groups. Since then, fertility has continued its pattern of decline, reaching historic lows in recent years. More recently, mortality declines in

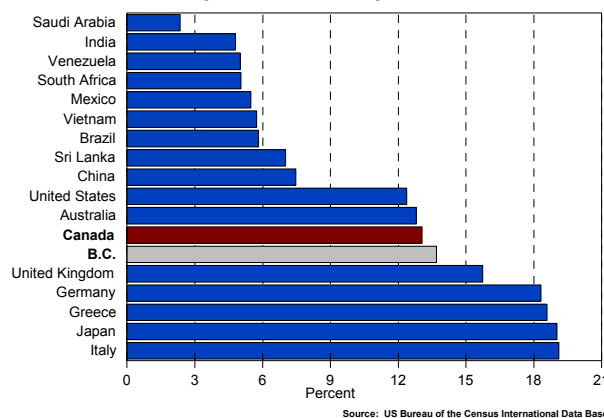
Where Are We Now?

The ageing of the population is a phenomenon shared throughout most of the world, although in different time frames and at different rates. B.C.'s proportion of seniors ranks up with the more industrialized countries, but it is lower than those of the United Kingdom, Germany, Greece, Japan and Italy.

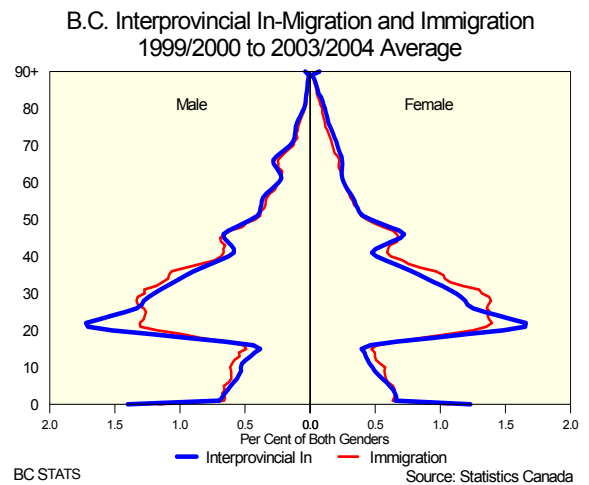
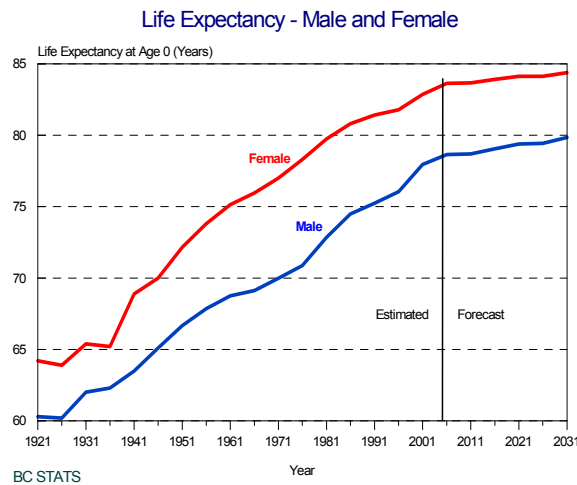
British Columbia Total Fertility Rate



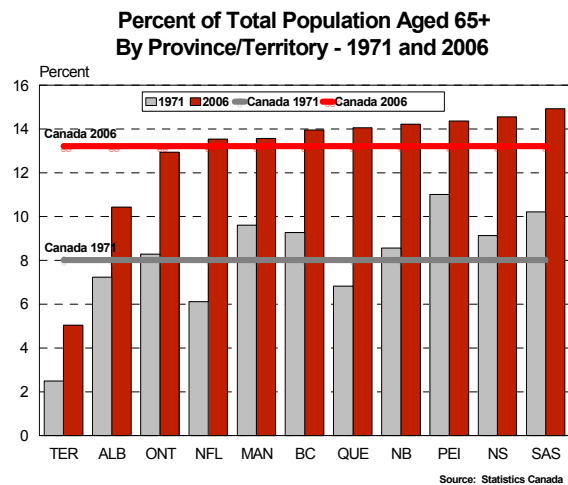
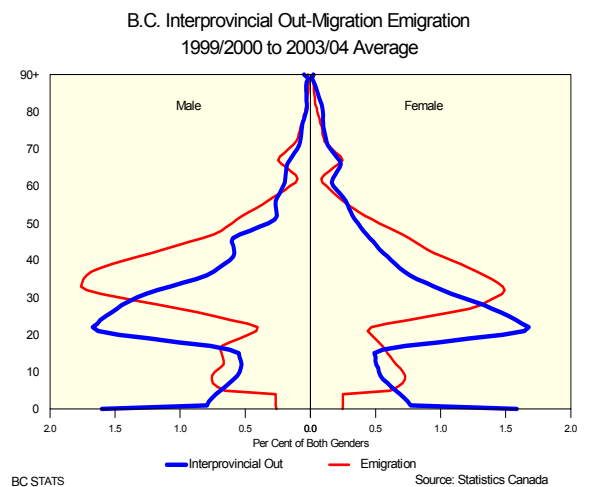
Percent of Total Population Aged 65+
By Selected Country - 2004



the older age groups is increasingly significant in swelling the relative size of older cohorts. In particular, improvements in interventions and medications may help older individuals survive for a longer period with chronic, degenerative diseases such as cancer and heart disease. B.C. has the highest life expectancy in Canada and one of the highest in the world.



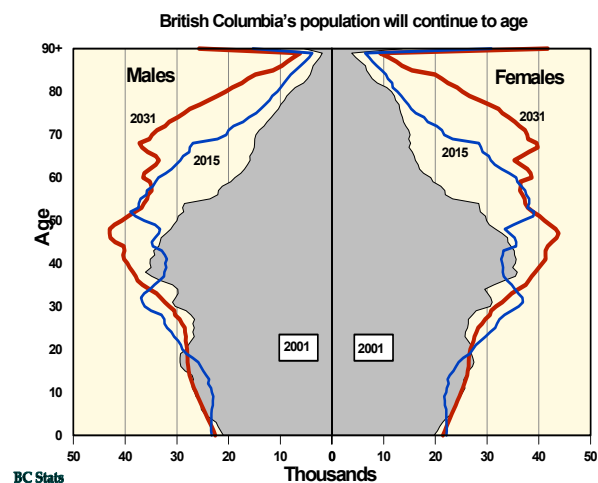
B.C. has the sixth oldest population in Canada. Patterns of migration and the age of migrants moving into and out of a region help determine its age structure. Migrants tend, on average, to be younger than the general population so regions with high in-migration tend to be younger than those with high net out-migration or low net in-migration.



generally speaking, more people leave than move into these regions.

The Shape of the Future...

Although the largest proportions of in-migrants to British Columbia tend to be under the age of 40, out-migrants also tend to be relatively young. However, the overall gain in population through migration means that B.C. will likely age at a slower rate than some other provinces. For example, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick have higher proportions of seniors because,



Over the next 25 years B.C. is expected to continue to grow both more populous and older. The baby boom cohort, which served to delay population ageing in its early years, will now accelerate the ageing process. The leading edge of the baby boom will turn 65 in 2011. However, the peak number of births in a single year during the baby boom occurred in 1960, and about 30% of the births occurred during the last five years of the period, from 1960 to 1964. The ranks of the baby boom cohort in B.C. has also grown through migration and, since the last baby boomer will not celebrate his or her 65th birthday until around 2029, this cohort will have a strong influence on the age structure of B.C.'s population for many decades to come. The median age has increased by seven years in the last two decades to almost 40 years, and is expected to add another 6.5 years over the next 25 years. By 2031 it is anticipated that about 1 in 4 B.C. residents will be aged 65 or older.

Regional Differences

Although migration generally slows population ageing at the provincial level, movement and redistribution of the population among different regions of the province can have variable effects. Amenities and opportunities in different regions of B.C. may act to draw people of specific ages to the region, while the lack of other amenities/opportunities may act to provide a push for other age groups to move out. In other words, people of different ages tend to look for different things in the place in which they choose to live. Amenities can include things like recreational opportunities, specialized medical services, or a peer group with whom to socialize.

As a result, some regions of the province have a population that is older than the province as a whole, while some are younger. Although the population in every region in the province is getting older, the process occurs at different rates, largely due

Percent of Total Population Aged 65 and Older						
HSDA	Estimated			Projected		
	1981	2001	2004	2006	2021	2031
South Vancouver Island	16.7	17.5	17.4	17.4	24.6	29.6
East Kootenay	8.2	13.7	14.0	14.5	23.1	29.0
Kootenay Boundary	11.5	15.8	16.6	17.0	24.3	28.4
Richmond	7.3	11.2	12.7	13.8	23.3	27.9
Central Vancouver Island	10.6	17.3	17.9	18.3	23.3	26.6
Okanagan	14.5	19.4	19.7	19.7	23.1	26.5
North Shore/Coast Garibaldi	10.1	13.7	14.2	14.6	21.8	26.0
Thompson Cariboo	6.6	13.2	14.1	14.7	21.3	25.2
British Columbia	10.7	13.2	13.7	14.0	19.9	24.4
North Vancouver Island	6.4	12.4	13.5	13.9	20.0	24.3
Fraser South	8.8	11.6	11.6	12.1	18.7	23.5
Northern Interior	3.5	8.0	8.7	9.3	17.5	23.2
Fraser North	10.4	10.9	11.4	11.8	17.5	22.5
Northwest	3.3	7.4	8.1	8.6	16.0	22.3
Vancouver	15.0	12.3	12.9	13.1	17.1	21.8
Northeast	4.2	7.3	7.5	7.8	14.7	21.2
Fraser East	11.6	13.7	13.7	13.9	16.9	20.6

Source: BC Stats (PEOPLE 31)

to the predominant type of migrants it either receives or sends.

Currently the oldest regions in the province are the Okanagan, south and central parts of Vancouver Island and parts of the Kootenays and the southern interior. In addition to 'ageing in place', the proportion of seniors in the Okanagan and on Vancouver Island has been boosted by the migration of seniors to these regions. On the other hand, increases in the proportion of seniors in the northern regions of the province in the last few decades were likely influenced by an out-migration of younger people due to diminishing economic opportunities in these regions.

Percent of Total Population Aged 85 and Older						
HSDA	Estimated			Projected		
	1981	2001	2004	2006	2021	2031
Richmond	0.5	1.3	1.6	1.9	2.9	4.0
East Kootenay	0.6	1.4	1.5	1.7	2.8	3.9
Kootenay Boundary	0.8	1.8	2.1	2.3	3.0	3.8
South Vancouver Island	2.0	2.5	2.8	3.1	2.9	3.8
Central Vancouver Island	0.7	1.6	1.9	2.3	3.3	3.8
Okanagan	1.0	2.2	2.4	2.6	3.3	3.6
Thompson Cariboo	0.4	1.1	1.3	1.5	2.8	3.5
North Shore/Coast Garibaldi	0.9	1.6	1.8	2.0	2.6	3.4
British Columbia	1.0	1.5	1.6	1.8	2.5	3.1
Fraser South	0.7	1.1	1.1	1.3	2.3	3.1
North Vancouver Island	0.4	1.1	1.3	1.5	2.1	2.8
Fraser North	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.6	2.0	2.6
Northern Interior	0.2	0.6	0.7	0.8	1.6	2.5
Vancouver	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	2.3	2.4
Fraser East	1.0	1.5	1.6	1.9	2.2	2.4
Northeast	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.7	1.5	2.3
Northwest	0.2	0.5	0.6	0.8	1.6	2.3

Source: BC Stats (PEOPLE 31)

Although the oldest seniors make up a small proportion of the total population, their numbers are growing, and the rate of growth is expected to pick up over the next quarter century. Since health conditions

and independence generally decline with advancing age, this implies an increase in the need for assisted living options and long term care.

Conclusions

Some researchers have suggested that the baby boom is a 'pig in a python', meaning that this large cohort is just passing through and, after the last boomer dies, the age structure will return to a state more closely resembling the pre-baby boom era. However, the baby boom did not cause population ageing. Rather, it has altered the timing and magnitude of a process that had already begun long before they were born. The marked changes in the age structure of the population over the twentieth century are a result of long-term and sustained changes first in fertility, and more recently in mortality. Assuming the current trends continue, it seems more likely that British Columbia has experienced a more permanent change in its demographic profile.