

Life expectancy at birth and infant mortality rates of Indigenous populations in Canada

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Life expectancy at birth (LEB) and the infant mortality rate (IMR) are two important indicators of overall population health. LEB summarizes the mortality levels observed at every age within a population during a given period of time, while the IMR measures the number of infant deaths under 1 year of age (per 1,000 live births).

Statistics Canada produces annual estimates of these two indicators for Canada and each of the provinces and territories, disaggregated by sex at birth. Estimates further disaggregated by demographic characteristics (such as race, ethnicity or Indigenous identity) pose a challenge because the primary data source, the Canadian Vital Statistics - Death Database (CVSD), does not contain the relevant information.

LEB among the Indigenous population in Canada is known to be lower than that among the non-Indigenous population, while the IMR is known to be higher. A lack of regular estimates of either of these indicators by Indigenous identity remains an important data gap.

The Canadian Census Health and Environment Cohorts (CanCHECs), which are population-based linked datasets that combine information from the long-form census questionnaires and the National Household Survey with data from the CVSD, can be used to estimate LEB by Indigenous identity.

Using the 2006, 2011 and 2016 CanCHECs, the newly available table [17-10-0160-01](#) presents estimates of LEB for various Indigenous populations over three five-year periods: 2006 to 2011, 2011 to 2016 and 2016 to 2021. Results demonstrate that, between the 2006-to-2011 and 2011-to-2016 periods, LEB increased among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population. Between the 2011-to-2016 and 2016-to-2021 periods, results varied significantly by province, territory and population group. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Quebec, for example, experienced gains in life expectancy, while in Ontario, a decrease was observed among the total population. Factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing opioid crisis—which had disproportionate effects on certain regions and population groups—may explain the differences in observed trends.

The Canadian Birth-Census Cohorts (CanBCCs), which are longitudinal linkages of birth, stillbirth and infant death data to the censuses, are more appropriate for directly computing the IMR than the CanCHECs. The IMRs for the same Indigenous populations were computed over three periods: 1994 to 1996, 2004 to 2006 and 2014 to 2016. Results demonstrate that reductions in the IMR were observed between the 1994-to-1996 and 2014-to-2016 periods for various population groups.

Users should exercise caution when using estimates from either the CanCHECs or the CanBCCs for comparative purposes. Changes observed in LEB or the IMR over time may be partially attributable to changes made to definitions relating to the Indigenous population between censuses, changes in the composition of the population, and differences in the way respondents classify their Indigenous identity. Given that estimates are often based on small sample sizes, users are additionally invited to consult the 95% confidence intervals accompanying estimates of the IMR and LEB.

Two new data tables on mortality outcomes among Indigenous populations are released today.

Table [17-10-0160-01](#) provides estimates of LEB at the national level (by sex), at the province or regional level, and based on residence within or outside of a census metropolitan area (CMA) for a series of three five-year reference periods beginning in 2006-2011. For more information on this table, see the publication "[Life expectancy at birth of Indigenous populations in Canada, 2006-2011, 2011-2016 and 2016-2021](#)."

Table [17-10-0161-01](#) provides estimates of IMRs at the national level (by sex) and based on residence within or outside of a CMA for Canada for the periods 2004-2006 and 2014-2016 and for Canada (excluding Ontario) for the periods 1994-1996, 2004-2006 and 2014-2016. For more information on this table, see the publication "[Infant mortality rates of Indigenous populations in Canada, 1994-1996, 2004-2006 and 2014-2016](#)."



Available tables: [17-10-0160-01](#) and [17-10-0161-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3231](#), [3233](#), [3234](#) and [3901](#).

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