

# Population profile of B.C.'s coastal regions

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## REVIEWER

No technical review

## What's happening?

Examining the population profile for a region is akin to studying the character of its communities. We looked at some demographic indicators to profile B.C.'s coastal regions and compare them to the province as a whole. Some aspects of demography, the study of human population change, can be related to community wellbeing. The population of B.C. increased by 1.1 percent annually between 2011 and 2016. However, we found that population increase is uneven. Growth is occurring in some coastal regions, but not others (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Population in the central coast and parts of the southern coast, including some areas of Vancouver Island, grew at a higher rate than the provincial growth rate.

We also found that while age and gender distribution in the coastal regions as a whole does not differ significantly from age and gender distribution in B.C., the dependency rate (i.e., the number of young and old as a proportion of the working-age population) is higher in a few specific coastal areas. In general, the north and central coastal areas have fewer elders and more youth in their populations than other coastal areas (see Current Status section).



Photo: Jenn Burt



Photo: Geralt, pixabay.com, [CC0 1.0](#)

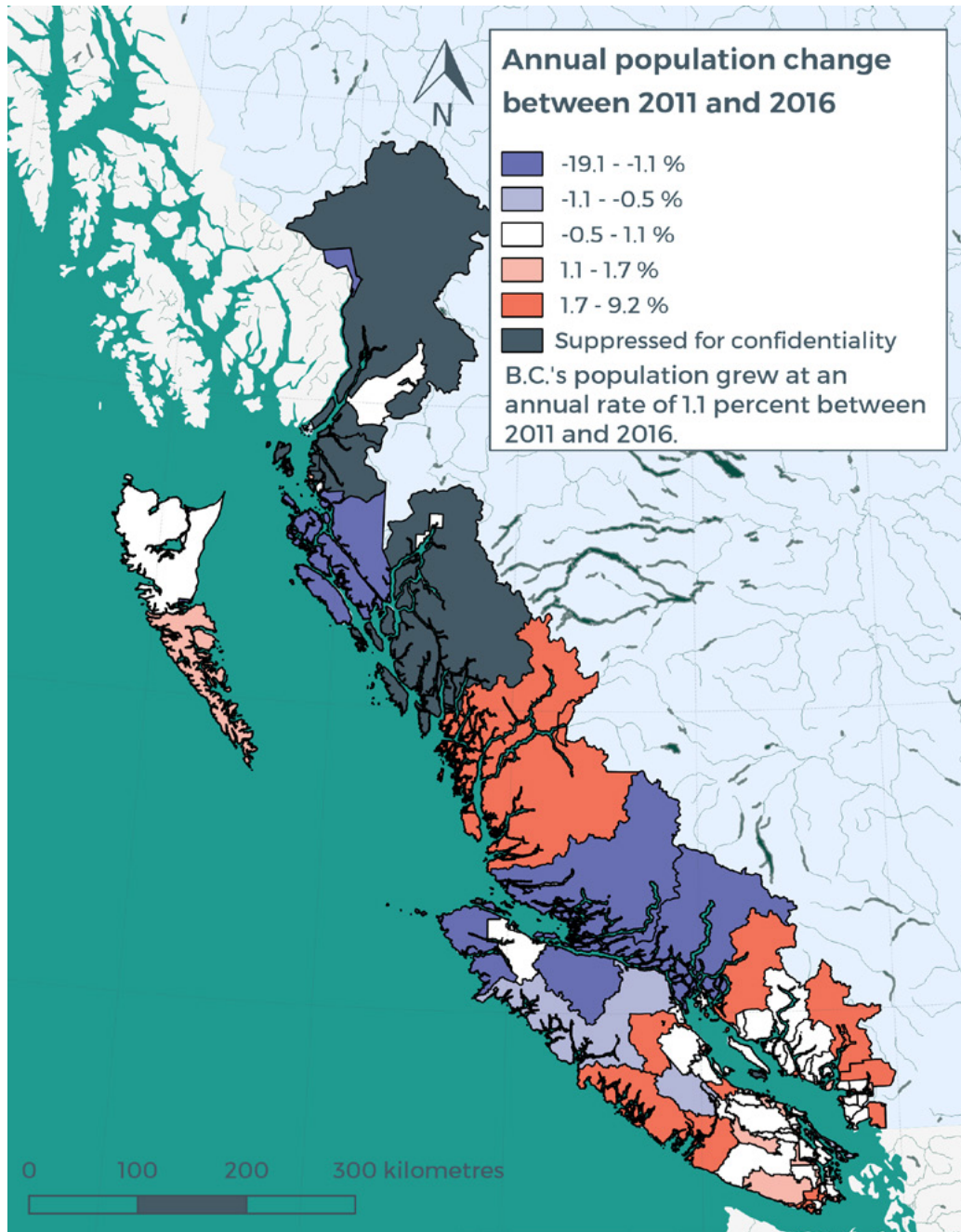


Figure 1. Annual population change (percent) between 2011 and 2016, mapped by census subdivision. Source: Statistics Canada

## Why is it important?

The population, growth, and age and gender distribution of a regional population have an impact on prospects for raising or maintaining the standard of living.<sup>2</sup> Growth can also bring challenges in terms of demand for housing, jobs and services,<sup>3</sup> and increase pressures on the natural environment. All of these factors influence community wellbeing.

Tracking the distribution of the population by age and gender has many important implications, ranging from the relative size of the labour force to school enrollment to needs in the health services realm.<sup>4</sup> Status and trends in age and gender distribution are useful for determining the age-based needs of the residents.

At the same time, these metrics describe the current and changing nature of communities and regions.

In general, population growth (Figure 1) is viewed as a strong sign of community vitality. Age structure that does not deviate from the provincial pattern signals that the region is supporting the needs of people of all ages, while a skewed distribution with an absence of specific age groups implies an unbalanced community. Population indicators also provide context that helps to understand trends in other indicators, including economic and environmental indicators<sup>5</sup> (see article in the Development Theme on Income and Labour).

## Is there a particular importance or connection to First Nations?

We did not look at First Nation communities in particular.

# What is the current status?

The population of coastal B.C. in 2016 was 3.35 million (72 percent of B.C.'s total population) and is unevenly distributed, with more people in the south (Figure 2).<sup>6</sup> Population growth follows this pattern, with small pockets of growth occurring mostly in southern areas (Figure 1). Haida Gwaii and the Central Coast are exceptions in northern B.C. with average annual growth rates ranging from 0.56 to 1.21 percent.

Age and gender distributions for the coastal regions show the same patterns as the province as a whole (Figure 3).<sup>7</sup> Generally, females slightly outnumber males and the largest age groups are just over 50 years of age. Notably, males and females in older age classes are present in the coastal regions at roughly the same proportion as in B.C. overall.

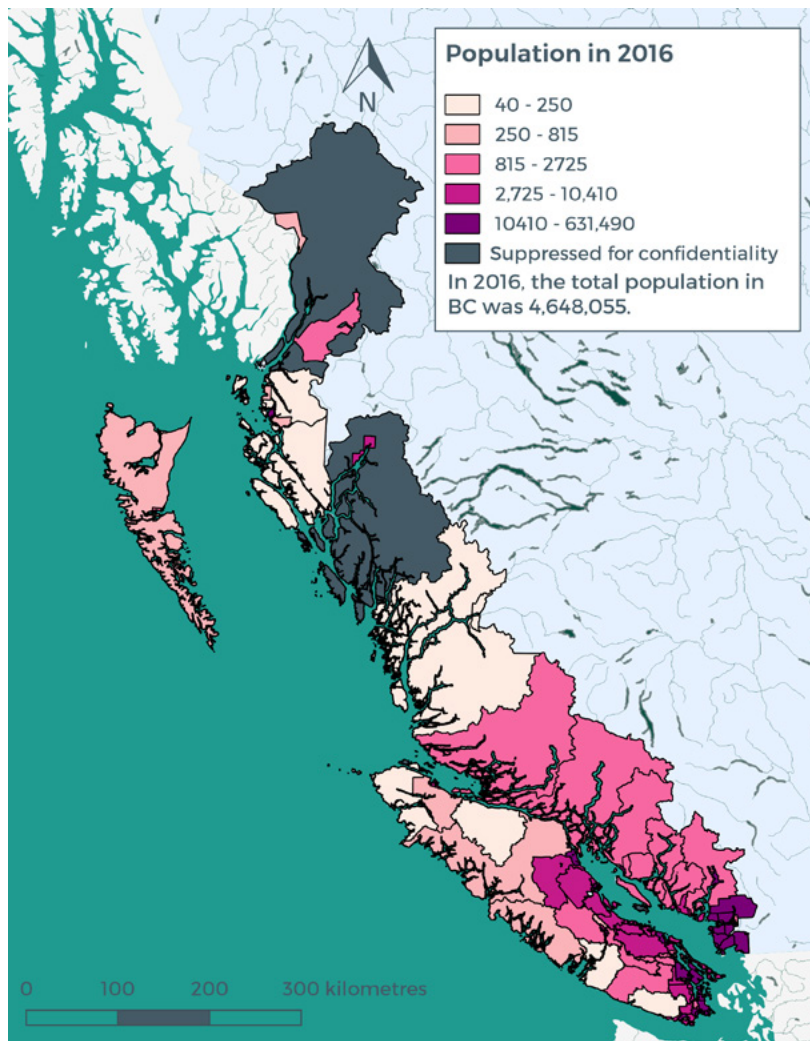


Figure 2. 2016 population per census subdivision. Source: Statistics Canada

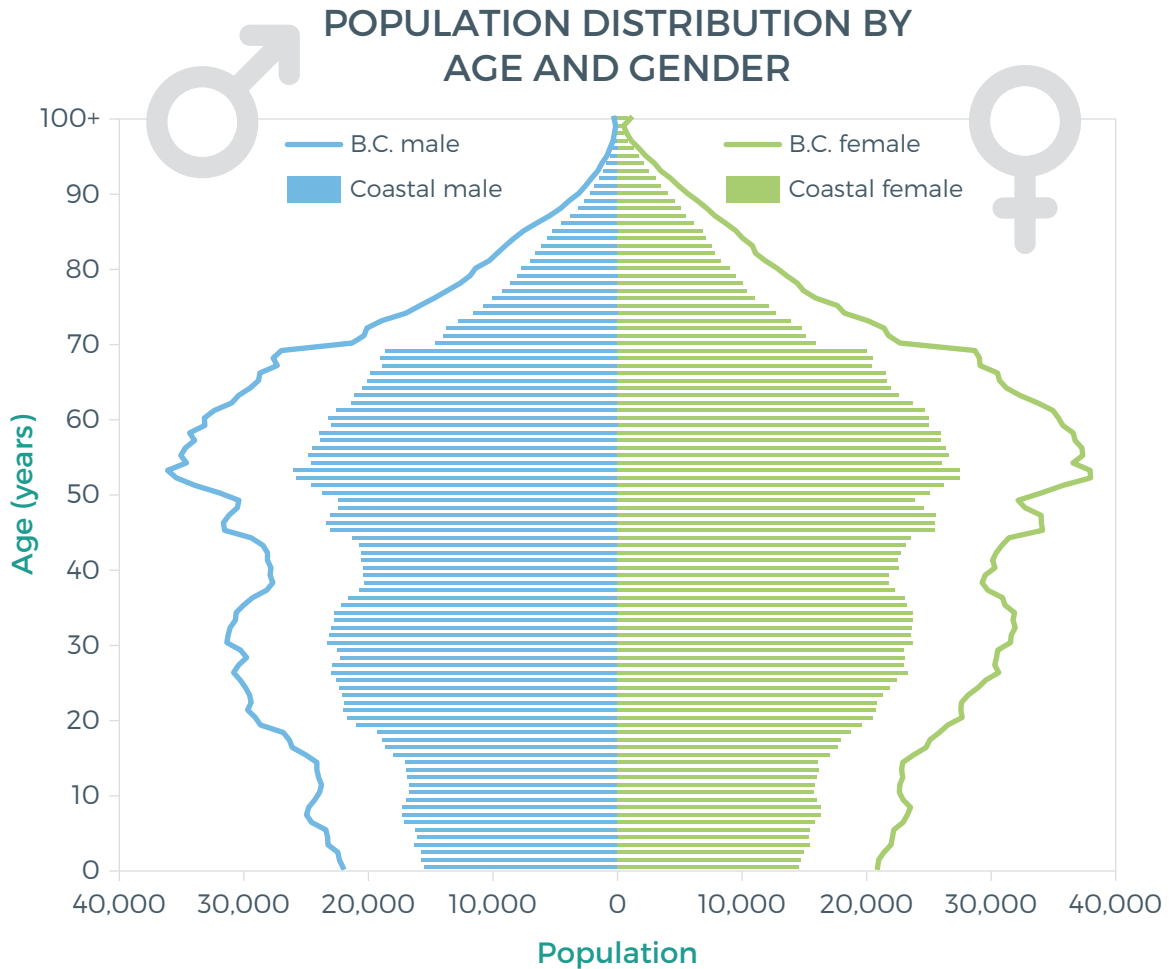


Figure 3. Population distribution by age and gender for coastal regions compared to all of B.C. Source: Statistics Canada

Examining the distribution of age classes, in terms of young (aged 19 and younger), elders (aged 65 and older), and those of working age (20 to 64 years), at a finer geographic scale along the coast reveals some differences (Figure 4).<sup>8</sup> The north and central coastal areas (including Kitimat-Stikine, Skeena-Queen Charlotte, Central Coast, and Mount Waddington) all have lower proportions of elders than most areas to

the south – except Greater Vancouver. These same north and central areas also have greater proportions of young, aged zero to 19.

Another demographic indicator related to community wellbeing is the dependency ratio, or the number of youth (persons under 20) and elders (over 65) per 100 persons aged 20 to 64 (i.e., those typically in the work

### COASTAL POPULATION BY AGE GROUP

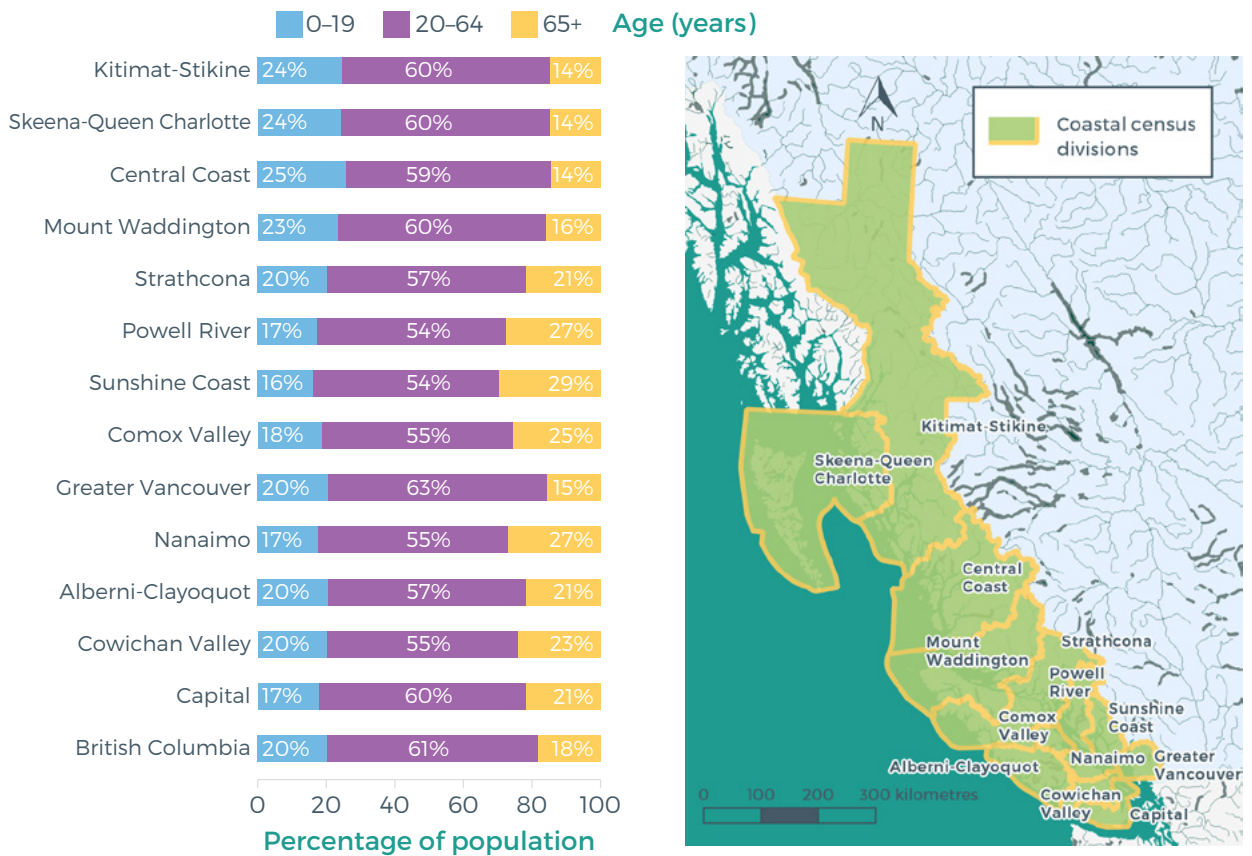


Figure 4. Percentage of population broken into three age groups for each coastal census division (left). Map of coastal census divisions (right). Source: Statistics Canada

force)<sup>9</sup> (Figure 5).<sup>10</sup> The only coastal census division with a dependency ratio lower than the provincial average is Greater Vancouver. This means that a larger proportion of youth and elderly are residing in coastal areas (outside of Greater Vancouver) than in the rest of B.C. With the exception of Vancouver and Victoria (Capital division), the further north you go along the coast the lower the dependency rate for those over 65 becomes. This is not surprising, as the elderly are

better supported, in terms of health care, in population centers with access to community resources (and we assume there are more of these in the south). However, overall wellbeing may not be improved if moving to access care comes at the expense of leaving family behind. Higher rates of youth dependency in the north and central coast (e.g., Central Coast and Kitimat-Stikine divisions) are notable.

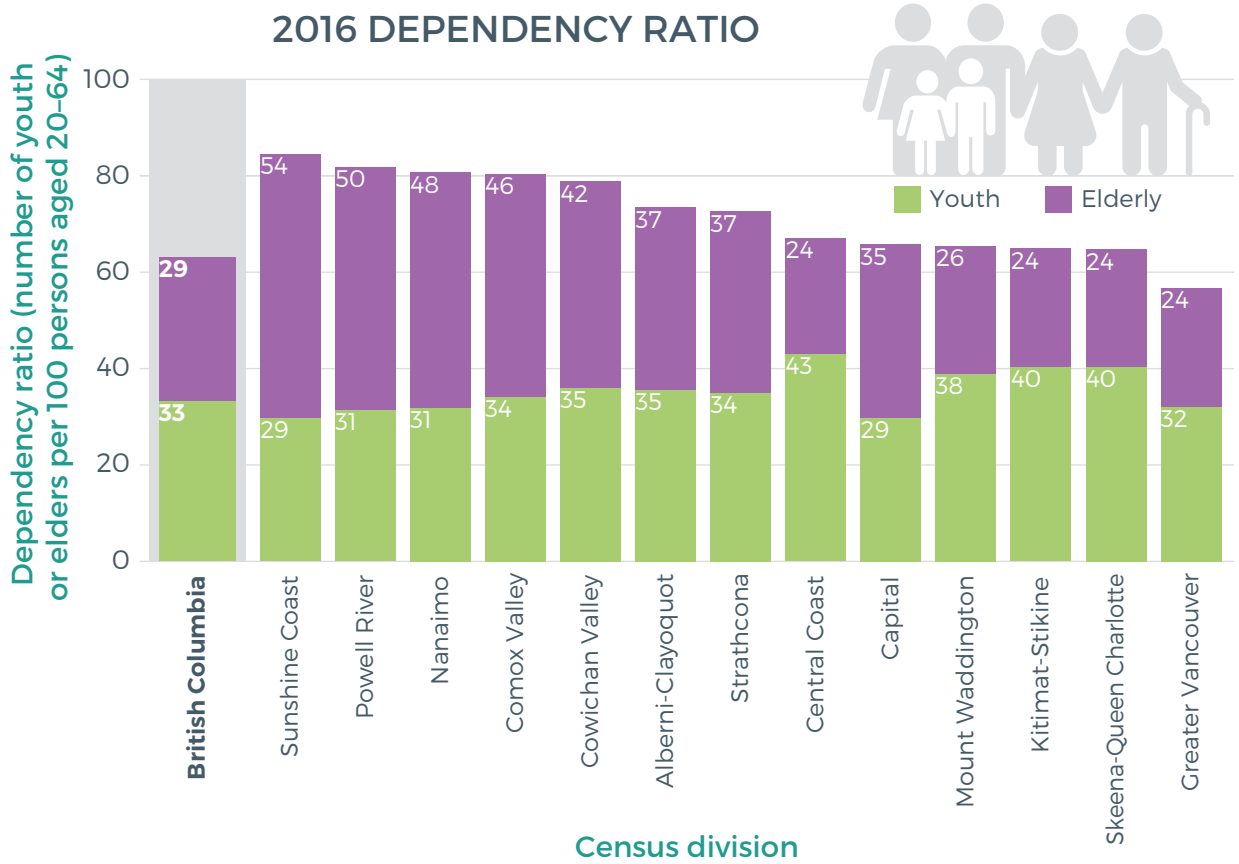


Figure 5. 2016 dependency ratio for B.C. overall and for coastal census divisions. Dependency ratio is the number of youth or elderly per 100 persons aged 20 to 64. Source: Statistics Canada

## What is being done?

Most of the information reported here is derived from the 2016 Canada Census. A regular census is crucial to tracking demographics, but suppression of data for confidentiality purposes and to maintain accuracy does occur. Statistics are not released for areas with small populations (less than 40), or for areas with a response rate under 50 percent, as the risk of inaccuracy is high.<sup>11</sup>

Both Statistics Canada and BC Stats release reports that describe and track demographic profiles. BC Stats also develops projections for the future. However, to date, the B.C. coast has not been profiled as a region of interest.

Vital Signs is a national program led and coordinated by Community Foundations of Canada that leverages local knowledge to measure the vitality of communities and support action towards improving collect-

ive quality of life.<sup>12</sup> Twenty different communities in B.C., not all coastal, have reported on their vital signs one or more times since 2006 through this program.<sup>13</sup> Some communities include demographic indicators as part of their community profile.

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) defines wellbeing as a state of comfort, health, or happiness that reflects community vitality, democratic engagement, education, environment, healthy populations, leisure and culture, living standards, and time use.<sup>14</sup> Until recently, economists and politicians equated economic growth, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with wellbeing. Now the social, cultural, environmental, and psychological dimensions of wellbeing are more commonly acknowledged and studied. Tracking the demographic characteristics of regions helps to shed light on these aspects of wellbeing.

## What can you do?



### Individual and Organization Actions:

- Be aware of population and demographic trends in your community and support government action to address change and imbalance.



### Government Actions and Policy:

- Establish a Coastal Zone Management Act in B.C. to reaffirm B.C.'s commitment to the conservation and sustainable management of estuarine, coastal and marine resources and to development a comprehensive Coastal Management Strategy.



# Resources

## Statistics Canada Census Program

<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>

## BC Statistics, People, Population & Community

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population>

## Canadian Index of Wellbeing

<https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/>

## Community Foundations of Canada Vital Signs Program

<http://communityfoundations.ca/vitalsigns/>

# Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, “Census Profile, 2016 Census,” Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 98-316-X2016001&, November 29, 2017. <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/olc-cel/olc.action?ObjId=98-316-X2016001&ObjType=46&lang=en&limit=0>.

<sup>2</sup> The Sheltair Group. 2009. Ecosystem Based Management Human Well Being Indicators, 2006 Baseline Report – Final. Report prepared for Ecosystem Based Management Working Group, B.C. 159pp.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, “2016 Census of Canada: Data Tables – Age (in Single Years) and Average Age (127) and Sex (3) for the Population of Canada, Provinces and Territories, Census Divisions, Census Subdivisions and Dissemination Areas, 2016 Census – 100% Data,” Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 98-400-X2016003., May 3, 2017, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/global/URLRedirect.cfm?lang=E&ips=98-400-X2016003>

<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada, “2016 Census of Canada.”

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada, “2016 Census of Canada.”

<sup>9</sup> “Dependency Ratio,” accessed November 9, 2017. <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-229-x/2009001/demo/dep-eng.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada, “2016 Census of Canada.”

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada, “Guide to the Census of Population, 2016. Chapter 11 – Dissemination,” Statistics Canada Catalogue No.98-304-X2016001, February 8, 2017, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/chap11-eng.cfm>

<sup>12</sup> <http://communityfoundations.ca/vitalsigns/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://communityfoundations.ca/vitalsigns/reports/>

<sup>14</sup> From CIW - <https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing>