

# Study: Emerging trends in living arrangements and conjugal unions for current and future seniors, 1981 to 2011

*Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in The Daily, Monday, February 24, 2014*

---

Between 1981 and 2011, the share of seniors 65 years of age and older who lived with their spouse or partner increased, while the overall share of those in other living arrangements decreased. The conjugal lives of seniors also changed, as the proportion of those who were divorced or separated rose from 4% to 12% over the period.

In 2011, 92% of all seniors 65 years of age and older lived in private households and 8% lived in collective dwellings. At least half of those living in collectives were 85 years of age or older.

The proportion of those living in collectives declined between 1981 and 2011, especially among older seniors. In 2011, 35% of women 85 years of age and older lived in collectives, compared with 41% in 1981. Among men in that same age group, the proportion declined from 29% to 23% over the period.

Among seniors living in private households in 2011, 76% of men and 49% of women lived as part of a couple, either as spouses or common-law partners. This compares with 75% of men and 40% of women in 1981.

A significant portion of seniors lived alone in 2011, with 35% of women and 17% of men 65 years of age and older living in private households. In 1981, a similar portion of women lived alone (36%), but slightly fewer men did so (14%).

The remainder of those in private households, 16% of women and 7% of men, lived with others, mostly relatives. These types of arrangements declined over the period, as 23% of senior women and 11% of senior men lived with others in 1981.

## Senior couples are closer in age

Two factors are related to the rise in the share of seniors living in couples. The first is an increase in life expectancy, especially among men, while the second is the growing share of senior couples that are closer in age.

In 2011, 49% of the 1.7 million senior couples in Canada (with at least one spouse or partner 65 years of age and older) had an age difference of three years or less. That is up from 40% in 1981.

Conversely, 46% of senior couples were composed of older men that were at least four years older than their spouse or partner. This compares with 52% in 1981.

For 6% of senior couples, the woman was at least four years older. In 1981, 8% of senior couples were in this situation.

## More seniors are divorced or separated

In 2011, 77% of the senior population had experienced just one union, either as married spouses or common-law partners.

The transition to "unmarried" status can have consequences on the financial and emotional well-being of seniors. Many of these transitions are caused by the death of one partner, but a growing number result from divorce and separation.

Between 1981 and 2011, the proportion of those who were divorced or separated increased from 4% to 12% among seniors 65 years of age and older.

---

However, many seniors experienced a second union in the aftermath of a divorce or separation. In 2011, 76% of men and 55% of women who had been divorced or separated eventually became part of a second union.

About three-quarters of seniors who experienced a second union got married again, with the rest living as common-law partners.

### **Conjugal patterns of future seniors are even more diverse**

The living arrangements of individuals who were 55 to 64 years of age, who represent the next cohort of seniors, were even more diverse than those of current seniors.

For example, the share of those who were divorced or separated was around 20% for individuals who were 55 to 64 years of age in 2011. This compares with 12% among current seniors.

Future seniors were also more likely to experience a second union after a relationship breakup. About 3 in 10 people 55 to 64 years of age experienced at least two unions during their lifetimes, compared with 19% among current seniors.

Finally, common-law relationships were more prevalent among future seniors. In 2011, 12% of individuals 55 to 64 years of age who were in a couple were common-law partners. This compares with 6% among seniors 65 years of age and older.

#### **Note to readers**

*In this release, data from the 1981 to 2011 censuses of population and from the 2011 General Social Survey were used to examine the trends in living arrangements and conjugal unions of seniors, who are defined as individuals 65 years of age or older, and future seniors, who are defined as individuals 55 to 64 years of age. According to census data, there were 4.6 million seniors in private households in 2011, while future seniors numbered 4.3 million.*

#### **Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers 3901 and 4501.**

The article "Emerging trends in living arrangements and conjugal unions for current and future seniors" is now available online in *Insights on Canadian Society* (75-006-X). The study can be accessed from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)).

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Anne Milan (613-951-8236; [anne.milan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:anne.milan@statcan.gc.ca)), Demography Division.

For more information on *Insights on Canadian Society*, contact Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté (613-951-0803; [sebastien.larochelle-cote@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:sebastien.larochelle-cote@statcan.gc.ca)), Labour Statistics Division.