

# Family Matters: Grandparents in Canada

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Understanding the ways in which grandparents contribute to their families and interact with children and grandchildren is key to assessing community and cultural well-being in Canada.

## Spotlight on Canadian families

Over the next few months, Statistics Canada will be releasing a "Family Matters" series based on new data released today from the General Social Survey on Families. These data build on the existing wealth of information on families in Canada, how they evolve as the population ages and as social, cultural and economic factors influence the structure of families across the country.

Recent information on families released by Statistics Canada forms the backdrop for the insights that will be presented in this series, and includes the video "[2016 Census: The Canadian families of today and yesterday](#);" the 2016 Census article on "[Families, households and marital status](#)," which shows that multi-generational families are the fastest growing type of household; the *Women in Canada* chapter "[Families and living arrangements](#)," which draws on multiple data sources to highlight the living arrangements of women and girls; the article "[Emerging trends in living arrangements and conjugal unions for current and future seniors](#);" and the article "[Living arrangements of children in Canada: A century of change](#)."

The "Family Matters" series builds on these earlier releases by delving into some key trends and changes influencing family structures and living arrangements and by providing new information on topics such as grandparents, adults living with their parents, couples who live in separate homes, parental leave and people who live alone.

Data stories will be released throughout February and March in articles and infographics highlighting the diversity of families today.

As structures and demographics of families in Canada continue to evolve, grandparents play an important role in family life. Information about grandparents is important for several reasons. Grandparents caring for their grandchildren enable parents to be employed. They also support their children and grandchildren in other ways—emotionally, financially or sharing household responsibilities. Grandparents are also a cultural link to the past. In turn, grandparents depend on their children and grandchildren for care and emotional, financial, and health or household support

There were 7.5 million grandparents aged 45 and older in Canada in 2017—the highest number since the data started being collected—according to the General Social Survey (GSS) on Family. This was up from 7.0 million in 2011 and 5.4 million in 1995.

## The share of grandparents aged 85 and older has almost tripled since 1995

While the overall number of grandparents has grown in recent years, their population share among those aged 45 and older has decreased: from 57% in 1995 to 47% in 2017.

The share of older cohorts of grandparents is increasing. For example, the share of grandparents aged 85 and older almost tripled from 1995 to 2017, rising from 3% to 8%.

One of the contributing factors to these changes in the demographic make-up of the grandparent population is women having children at a later age than in the past, a phenomenon that leads to delayed grandparenthood.

Today, in the first release of data from the 2017 GSS on Family, Statistics Canada provides a portrait of the country's 7.5 million grandparents.



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## Grandmothers outnumber grandfathers

Grandmothers continued to outnumber grandfathers in Canada at 4.2 million grandmothers versus 3.3 million grandfathers. This results from the higher life expectancy of women relative to men.

## The average age of grandparents is increasing

With the aging of the population and delayed childbearing trends, grandparents are older now than they were in the past. Their average age was 68 in 2017, up from 65 in 1995.

As part of the 2017 GSS on Family, grandparents were also asked to report how old they were when their first grandchild was born or adopted. (This was the first time this question was asked in the GSS.) In 2017, the average age at which Canadians first became a grandparent was 51 for women and 54 for men.

## Today's grandparents have fewer grandchildren

The number of grandchildren per grandparent (aged 45 and older) has declined since the 1990s, averaging four in 2017, down from five in 1995.

Overall, more than three-quarters of grandparents had fewer than five grandchildren, compared with 43% in 1995.

## Foreign-born grandparents are twice as likely to live with their grandchildren

The proportion of grandparents sharing a home with at least one of their grandchildren is small, and has remained fairly steady over time. In 2017, 5% of grandparents aged 45 and older lived with a grandchild, similar to the 4% observed in 1995.

Many factors can affect a person's decision to live with one or more grandchildren, including cultural and economic factors as well as personal choice or circumstances. In some families, grandparents play an important role in caring for children and in others, families provide care for aging grandparents. According to data from the 2017 GSS, foreign-born grandparents (9%) were more likely to live with at least one grandchild than their Canadian-born counterparts (4%).

## Today marks the first of many releases in the "Family Matters" series

Using the most recent information from the 2017 GSS on Family, Statistics Canada will be releasing new data stories in the "Family Matters" series in the coming months. This series will give important perspectives on the diversity of families in Canada.

**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4501](#).**

**Available tables: table [39-10-0044-01](#).**

The infographic "[Family Matters: Grandparents in Canada](#)" is now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).