

Pension plans in Canada, as of January 1, 2018

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Membership in registered pension plans (RPPs) in Canada was more than 6.3 million in 2017, up 1.0% or 62,800 members from 2016.

For a second year in a row, the number of female members reached a new all-time high. A record 3.2 million women were members of an RPP in 2017, up 36,700. This gain increased the share of female membership to 50.5%.

Meanwhile, 26,100 more men were members of RPPs in 2017, following a decline of 35,000 in 2016.

Public sector workers account for just over half of all pension plan members

Membership in public sector pension plans increased by over 49,000 in 2017 (+34,100 women and +15,200 men) to 3.3 million, accounting for 52.6% of total RPP membership in 2017.

Meanwhile, the number of members in private sector plans rose by 13,500 (+10,900 men and +2,600 women) to 3 million.

Over one-third of paid workers are covered by a registered pension plan

Although more people were members of an RPP in 2017, the pension coverage rate, that is, the proportion of all paid workers covered by an RPP, declined from 37.5% in 2016 to 37.1%. For women, the pension coverage rate was down 0.2% to 39.3%, while the coverage rate for men decreased 0.5% to 35.1%.

Over 4.2 million paid workers were covered by a defined benefit pension plan in 2017, up 0.7% from 2016. Defined benefit plans accounted for two-thirds (67.0%) of members with an RPP in 2017, down 0.3% from 2016.

Membership in defined contribution plans, the next most common type of pension plan, rose by 3.5% in 2017 to almost 1.2 million, accounting for 18.4% of all RPP membership. Most members in defined contribution plans work in the private sector.

Membership in other plan types, excluding defined benefit and defined contribution, such as hybrid, composite and combination plans declined by 4,200 members in 2017. Nearly 924,000 people, accounting for 14.6% of RPP membership, belong to plans not classified as the conventional defined benefit or defined contribution models. Despite the drop in 2017, membership in these other plan types has risen sharply over the past decade.

Over half the value of registered pension plan assets held by large plans

Total employer and employee contributions to RPPs rose 1.5% year over year to \$70 billion in 2017. Employer contributions for unfunded liabilities accounted for \$9.7 billion. When payments for unfunded liabilities are excluded, employers contributed \$36.1 billion, or 60% of the total, while employee contributions accounted for the remaining 40%, or \$24.5 billion. In the private sector, employers contributed 78.2% of total contributions, while in the public sector, employers contributed 58.5%.

The market value of assets in RPPs rose by \$124.0 billion in 2017 to nearly \$1.9 trillion (+0.7%). More than half (56.3%) of these assets were held by 31 large plans, each with 30,000 or more members. These 31 plans also accounted for half of total RPP membership in 2017.

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Note to readers

Registered pension plans are established by employers or unions for employees. These data come from the Pension Plans in Canada Survey as of January 1, 2018.

A **defined benefit plan** defines the benefits to be paid according to the terms and conditions of the plan. The employer's contributions are not predetermined, but are a function of the cost of providing the promised pension.

A **defined contribution plan** specifies the contributions made by the employer, as well as by the employee if the plan is contributory. Pension benefits paid are a function of accumulated contributions and investment returns.

Other plans include those having a hybrid, composite, defined benefit / defined contribution or other component.

Membership is defined as active members of the pension plan currently making contributions to the pension plan or for whom contributions are being made.

An **unfunded liability** generally corresponds to any amount by which the assets of a pension plan are less than its liabilities.

Table 1
Registered pension plan membership, by sector and type of plan

	2016	2017	2016 to 2017	2016 to 2017
	number		net change	% change
Total, all sectors	6,262,893	6,325,712	62,819	1.0
Males	3,106,383	3,132,511	26,128	0.8
Females	3,156,510	3,193,201	36,691	1.2
Defined benefit plans	4,212,348	4,240,414	28,066	0.7
Males	1,898,127	1,905,938	7,811	0.4
Females	2,314,221	2,334,476	20,255	0.9
Defined contribution plans	1,122,465	1,161,400	38,935	3.5
Males	678,448	702,747	24,299	3.6
Females	444,017	458,653	14,636	3.3
Other plans ¹	928,080	923,898	-4,182	-0.5
Males	529,808	523,826	-5,982	-1.1
Females	398,272	400,072	1,800	0.5
Public sector	3,276,698	3,325,996	49,298	1.5
Males	1,202,024	1,217,219	15,195	1.3
Females	2,074,674	2,108,777	34,103	1.6
Defined benefit plans	2,981,745	3,020,547	38,802	1.3
Males	1,075,889	1,086,304	10,415	1.0
Females	1,905,856	1,934,243	28,387	1.5
Defined contribution plans	148,317	151,530	3,213	2.2
Males	61,268	62,443	1,175	1.9
Females	87,049	89,087	2,038	2.3
Other plans ¹	146,636	153,919	7,283	5.0
Males	64,867	68,472	3,605	5.6
Females	81,769	85,447	3,678	4.5
Private sector	2,986,195	2,999,716	13,521	0.5
Males	1,904,359	1,915,292	10,933	0.6
Females	1,081,836	1,084,424	2,588	0.2
Defined benefit plans	1,230,603	1,219,867	-10,736	-0.9
Males	822,238	819,634	-2,604	-0.3
Females	408,365	400,233	-8,132	-2.0
Defined contribution plans	974,148	1,009,870	35,722	3.7
Males	617,180	640,304	23,124	3.7
Females	356,968	369,566	12,598	3.5
Other plans ¹	781,444	769,979	-11,465	-1.5
Males	464,941	455,354	-9,587	-2.1
Females	316,503	314,625	-1,878	-0.6

1. Other plans include plans having a hybrid, composite, defined benefit / defined contribution or other component.

Source(s): Table 11-10-0106-01 (formerly CANSIM 280-0016).

Table 2
Percentage of paid workers covered by a registered pension plan

	1997	2002	2007	2012	2017
	%				
Total, all sectors	41.5	39.6	38.4	38.5	37.1
Males	42.8	40.0	37.8	37.0	35.1
Females	39.9	39.1	39.0	40.1	39.3
Defined benefit plans	35.6	32.5	29.5	27.5	24.9
Males	36.2	32.2	28.0	24.6	21.4
Females	35.0	33.0	31.1	30.7	28.7
Defined contribution plans	5.2	6.0	6.1	6.4	6.8
Males	5.9	6.8	6.9	7.4	7.9
Females	4.4	5.1	5.2	5.4	5.6
Other plans ¹	0.6	1.0	2.8	4.6	5.4
Males	0.8	1.1	2.9	5.1	5.9
Females	0.5	1.0	2.7	4.0	4.9
Public sector	88.0	86.6	83.5	87.9	87.1
Males	87.7	89.8	83.8	86.2	84.5
Females	88.3	84.3	83.3	88.9	88.7
Defined benefit plans	83.6	81.4	77.9	82.8	79.1
Males	83.2	84.2	77.5	80.5	75.4
Females	84.0	79.4	78.1	84.2	81.4
Defined contribution plans	3.7	4.3	3.8	4.0	4.0
Males	3.7	4.4	4.1	4.4	4.3
Females	3.8	4.2	3.7	3.8	3.7
Other plans ¹	0.7	0.9	1.8	1.0	4.1
Males	0.8	1.2	2.1	1.3	4.8
Females	0.5	0.7	1.5	0.9	3.6
Private sector	28.2	28.2	25.7	24.2	22.7
Males	32.9	32.2	28.7	27.4	25.6
Females	22.0	22.8	22.0	20.0	18.9
Defined benefit plans	21.9	21.3	15.8	11.5	9.2
Males	25.7	24.6	18.1	13.6	11.0
Females	16.9	17.0	13.0	8.7	7.0
Defined contribution plans	5.6	6.2	6.7	7.1	7.6
Males	6.4	6.9	7.4	8.0	8.5
Females	4.6	5.3	5.8	6.0	6.4
Other plans ¹	0.6	0.6	3.1	5.6	5.8
Males	0.8	0.8	3.1	5.8	6.1
Females	0.4	0.5	3.2	5.3	5.5

1. Other plans include plans having a hybrid, composite, defined benefit / defined contribution or other component.

Source(s): Tables 11-10-0133-01 and 14-10-0027-01.

Available tables: [11-10-0062-01](#) to [11-10-0064-01](#) , [11-10-0094-01](#) to [11-10-0099-01](#) , [11-10-0106-01](#), [11-10-0111-01](#), [11-10-0114-01](#) to [11-10-0122-01](#) , [11-10-0124-01](#) and [11-10-0133-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [2609](#).

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