

Pension plans in Canada, as of January 1, 2019

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Active membership in registered pension plans (RPPs) in Canada surpassed 6.4 million in 2018, up 1.3%, or nearly 85,000 members, from 2017.

For the third year in a row, women membership reached yet another all-time high in 2018—the number of women who were members of an RPP increased 49,200 to 3.24 million. Meanwhile, the number of men who were members of an RPP increased 35,500 to 3.17 million in 2018—the biggest increase since 2014. Women increased their share of membership slightly to 50.6%.

Both public and private sector add members in 2018

Membership in public sector pension plans increased by nearly 65,000 in 2018 (+44,100 women and +20,400 men) to almost 3.4 million, accounting for 52.9% of total RPP membership in 2018.

Meanwhile, the number of members in private-sector plans rose by 20,100 (+15,000 men and +5,100 women) to over 3 million.

Percentage of paid workers covered by a registered pension plan increases

The significant increase in RPP membership in 2018 resulted in a 0.4% rise in the pension coverage rate—the proportion of all paid workers covered by an RPP. The coverage rate increased from 37.1% in 2017 to 37.5% in 2018 and, although this was the largest annual increase since 2009, the coverage rate was still far below those of the 70s, 80s and early 90s, when the rates were consistently above 40%. The coverage rate was up for both women and men. For women, the pension coverage rate grew 0.2% to 39.5%, while the coverage rate for men increased 0.5% to 35.6%.

Nearly 4.3 million paid workers were covered by a defined benefit pension plan in 2018, up 1.2% from 2017. Defined benefit plans accounted for 67.0% of members with an RPP in 2018—unchanged from 2017.

Membership in defined contribution plans, the next most common type of pension plan, rose by 2.8% in 2018 to nearly 1.2 million, accounting for 18.6% of all RPP membership. Most members in defined contribution plans worked in the private sector.

Membership in other plan types, excluding defined benefit and defined contribution, such as hybrid, composite and combination plans, grew by 1,900 members in 2018. Nearly 926,000 workers—or 14.4% of RPP membership—were covered by plans not classified as the conventional defined benefit or defined contribution models.

Employer contributions for unfunded liability at their lowest since 2009

Total employer and employee contributions to RPPs reached \$70.3 billion in 2018, up \$10 million from 2017. Employer contributions for unfunded liabilities fell to their lowest level since 2009, at \$7.7 billion. Excluding payments for unfunded liabilities, employers contributed \$37.1 billion (59% of the total), while employee contributions accounted for the remaining 41% (\$25.5 billion). Private-sector employers contributed \$17.7 billion (76.2% of total sector employee and employer contributions), while public-sector employers contributed \$27.1 billion (57.5% of total sector employee and employer contributions).

The market value of assets in RPPs rose by \$23 billion in 2018, surpassing \$1.9 trillion. The 32 largest plans, each with 30,000 or more members, held 58% of these assets and accounted for nearly 51% of total membership.



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, 2019.

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, combination 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 plan type

	2017	2018	2017 to 2018	2017 to 2018
	number		net change	% change
Total, all sectors	6,325,712	6,410,394	84,682	1.3
Males	3,132,511	3,167,976	35,465	1.1
Females	3,193,201	3,242,418	49,217	1.5
Defined benefit plans	4,240,414	4,290,958	50,544	1.2
Males	1,905,938	1,923,359	17,421	0.9
Females	2,334,476	2,367,599	33,123	1.4
Defined contribution plans	1,161,400	1,193,678	32,278	2.8
Males	702,747	719,081	16,334	2.3
Females	458,653	474,597	15,944	3.5
Other plans ¹	923,898	925,758	1,860	0.2
Males	523,826	525,536	1,710	0.3
Females	400,072	400,222	150	0.0
Public sector	3,325,996	3,390,531	64,535	1.9
Males	1,217,219	1,237,637	20,418	1.7
Females	2,108,777	2,152,894	44,117	2.1
Defined benefit plans	3,020,547	3,075,348	54,801	1.8
Males	1,086,304	1,103,179	16,875	1.6
Females	1,934,243	1,972,169	37,926	2.0
Defined contribution plans	151,530	155,763	4,233	2.8
Males	62,443	64,617	2,174	3.5
Females	89,087	91,146	2,059	2.3
Other plans ¹	153,919	159,420	5,501	3.6
Males	68,472	69,841	1,369	2.0
Females	85,447	89,579	4,132	4.8
Private sector	2,999,716	3,019,863	20,147	0.7
Males	1,915,292	1,930,339	15,047	0.8
Females	1,084,424	1,089,524	5,100	0.5
Defined benefit plans	1,219,867	1,215,610	-4,257	-0.3
Males	819,634	820,180	546	0.1
Females	400,233	395,430	-4,803	-1.2
Defined contribution plans	1,009,870	1,037,915	28,045	2.8
Males	640,304	654,464	14,160	2.2
Females	369,566	382,812	13,246	3.6
Other plans ¹	769,979	766,338	-3,641	-0.5
Males	455,354	455,695	341	0.1
Females	314,625	310,643	-3,982	-1.3

1. Other plans include plans having a hybrid, composite, combination 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

	1998	2003	2008	2013	2018
	%				
Total, all sectors	40.6	39.2	38.5	37.9	37.5
Males	41.9	39.3	37.5	36.6	35.6
Females	39.2	39.0	39.6	39.4	39.5
Defined benefit plans	34.7	31.9	28.8	27.0	25.2
Males	35.1	31.2	26.9	24.1	21.7
Females	34.2	32.7	31.0	30.1	29.0
Defined contribution plans	5.3	6.2	6.0	6.4	6.7
Males	6.0	6.9	6.8	7.4	7.8
Females	4.5	5.3	5.2	5.3	5.6
Other plans ¹	0.6	1.1	3.6	4.6	5.6
Males	0.8	1.2	3.8	5.2	6.1
Females	0.5	1.0	3.4	3.9	5.0
Public sector	87.3	85.5	84.7	87.1	88.0
Males	88.3	87.4	83.3	85.7	85.9
Females	86.4	84.3	85.6	87.9	89.2
Defined benefit plans	82.6	79.4	79.1	82.1	80.1
Males	83.4	80.4	77.2	80.0	76.9
Females	82.0	78.7	80.3	83.4	82.0
Defined contribution plans	4.0	4.9	3.9	3.9	4.0
Males	4.1	5.5	4.1	4.3	4.4
Females	3.9	4.4	3.7	3.7	3.7
Other plans ¹	0.6	1.2	1.7	1.1	4.0
Males	0.8	1.5	2.0	1.4	4.7
Females	0.5	1.1	1.6	0.9	3.5
Private sector	27.7	26.7	25.2	23.7	23.0
Males	32.1	30.0	28.3	27.1	26.0
Females	22.1	22.3	21.4	19.5	19.1
Defined benefit plans	21.4	19.1	14.4	11.1	9.5
Males	24.9	21.7	16.8	13.2	11.2
Females	16.9	15.8	11.5	8.3	7.2
Defined contribution plans	5.7	6.5	6.6	7.1	7.5
Males	6.4	7.2	7.3	8.0	8.4
Females	4.7	5.6	5.7	5.9	6.3
Other plans ¹	0.6	1.1	4.2	5.6	6.0
Males	0.7	1.1	4.2	5.9	6.4
Females	0.5	1.0	4.2	5.2	5.6

1. Other plans include plans having a hybrid, composite, combination 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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