

Wholesale trade, April 2021

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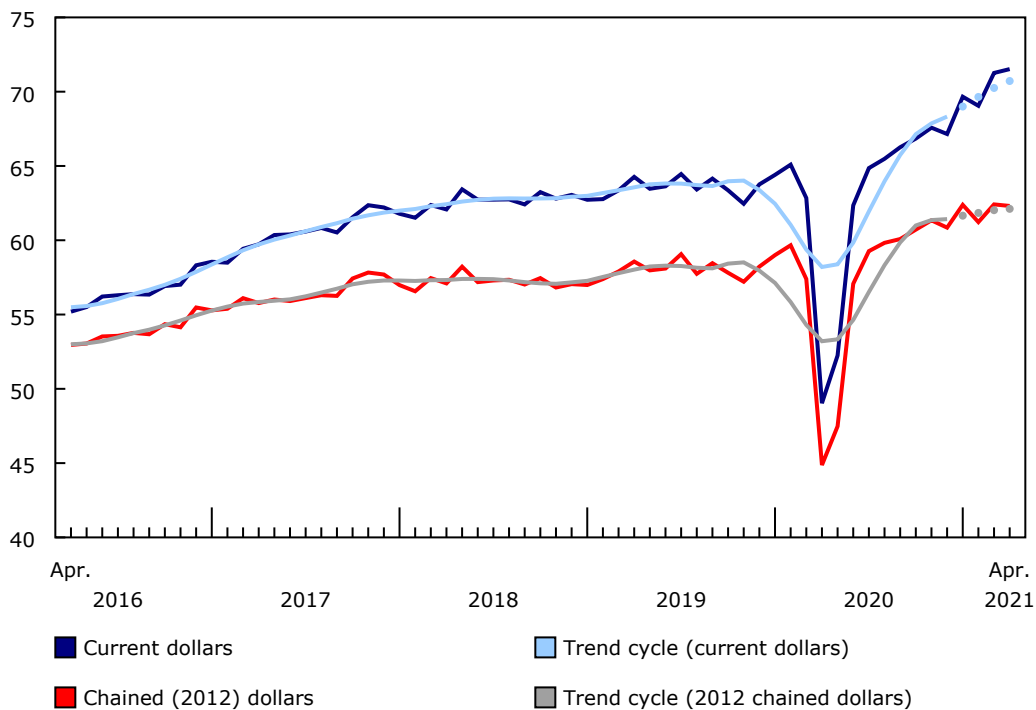
Wholesale sales rise

Sales by Canadian wholesalers rose 0.4% in April to \$71.5 billion, the third increase in the past four months. Activity in the sector was mixed in April, with continued strong growth in the sale of building materials and supplies largely offset by lower sales in the motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and accessories subsector and the miscellaneous subsector.

Wholesale volumes fell 0.2% during the month.

Chart 1
Wholesale sales increase in April

billions of dollars



Note(s): The higher variability associated with the trend-cycle estimates is indicated with a dotted line on the chart for the current reference month and the three previous months. For more information, see the note to readers.

Source(s): Tables [20-10-0074-01](#) and [20-10-0003-01](#).

Sales of building material and supplies continue to grow

Sales in the subsector rose 8.7% in April to \$13.1 billion, the highest level on record. Sales in April 2021 were 26.5% higher than in December 2020. The demand for housing and home renovations has generated both an increase in the volume of building materials and supplies sold, and in their prices. Exports of lumber and sawmill products rose 7.8% in April, largely to meet the demand of American home builders. The number of new housing starts fell in both Canada and the United States in April, however, there is usually a several month lag between the start of a new home build and the use of lumber. As a result, sales in April reflect the fact

that new home builds have been trending higher for the past several months. In April, the price of softwood lumber (the largest component of the building material and supplies subsector) rose 10.1% and was 169.4% higher than one year ago in April 2020, according to the Industrial Product Price Index.

Sales of motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts and accessories fell 4.4% in April, reflecting the ongoing shortage of microprocessors required to build automobiles. This was the third decline in the past five months. Across North America, assembly plants have been forced to cut back production or completely close operations for periods of time because of a lack of semiconductor chips. Because of this, total output in the North American automotive industry has been down by several hundred thousand units over the past few months. Sales in the subsector were at their lowest level since June 2020.

Sales in the miscellaneous subsector fell 3.4% to \$9.3 billion. It was the first decline after two months of gains. Most of the decline came from the other miscellaneous wholesale products industry which includes wholesaling of many mining and forestry products.

Sales rise in seven provinces

Wholesale sales rose in seven provinces and one territory in April, representing 45% of national wholesale sales.

The largest increase in April was in Alberta, where wholesalers reported \$7.6 billion in sales, 5.3% more than in March. This was the second consecutive increase in wholesale sales for Alberta and the highest value on record. The building material and supplies wholesalers reported the largest growth in sales (+20.5% to \$1.5 billion). Residential building permits in Alberta increased by 15.4% in April. The subsector with the next largest change was machinery, equipment and supplies, which reported \$2.1 billion in sales in April, an increase of \$81.8 million (+4.0%) compared with March.

All subsectors in Alberta reported higher sales, except for farm product wholesalers, who reported \$121.5 million in sales—\$6.3 million (-4.9%) less than in March.

Although wholesale sales were higher in April overall, the largest change was in Ontario, where sales were 1.9% (-\$678.1 million) lower than they were in March, for a total of \$35.1 billion. Lower sales in Ontario accounted for more than 90% of the month-over-month change for all provinces that had lower sales in April.

Ontario's decline largely reverses the province's growth in 2021 so far, as monthly sales have dropped to within \$100 million of December 2020's level. Half of the decrease in Ontario was caused by lower sales in the motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and accessories subsector, which was affected by the ongoing semiconductor shortage. Subsector sales fell 8.4% to \$6.4 billion. A third of the decrease came from the miscellaneous subsector, which reported an 8.3% decrease in sales.

The largest increase in sales in Ontario was reported in the building material and supplies subsector, which reported a 5.3% rise in sales, with growth in all three industries.

No change in inventories

The value of wholesale inventory in April was unchanged from March at \$93.4 billion. Higher inventories in four of the seven subsectors were offset by lower inventories in the other three subsectors. Inventory levels for this month were the highest on record for the second consecutive month.

The largest increase in inventories came from the building material and supplies subsector (+5.3% to \$15.9 billion). This was the largest inventory value on record, and marked the seventh consecutive increase as there continued to be high demand for building materials. The lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies industry contributed half of the increase—the fourth consecutive record-breaking month for this industry.

The largest decrease in inventories was in the machinery, equipment and supplies subsector (-3.5% to \$25.6 billion). Half of this decrease was from the other machinery, equipment and supplies industry, which, among other professional establishments, includes health care supply wholesalers.

The inventory-to-sales ratio remained constant at 1.31 in April, as it has been for three of the four months in 2021. The inventory-to-sales ratio is a measure of the time (in months) required to exhaust inventories if sales were to remain at their current level.

Table 1
Wholesale merchants' sales by industry – Seasonally adjusted

	April 2020	March 2021 ^r	April 2021 ^p	March to April 2021	April 2020 to April 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total, wholesale sales (current dollars)	49,032	71,260	71,520	0.4	45.9
Total, wholesale sales (2012 chained dollars)	44,870	62,413	62,309	-0.2	38.9
Total wholesale sales (current dollars), excluding motor vehicle and parts	46,048	60,654	61,381	1.2	33.3
Farm product	694	959	955	-0.4	37.6
Food, beverage and tobacco	11,720	12,526	12,474	-0.4	6.4
Food	10,320	10,876	10,842	-0.3	5.1
Beverage	741	818	829	1.3	11.9
Cigarette and tobacco product	595	661	655	-1.0	9.9
Cannabis	64	172	149	-13.1	132.4
Personal and household goods	7,428	10,265	10,305	0.4	38.7
Textile, clothing and footwear	473	1,183	1,251	5.7	164.6
Home entertainment equipment and household appliance	733	946	973	2.9	32.7
Home furnishings	412	720	715	-0.6	73.8
Personal goods	447	1,032	1,076	4.3	140.7
Pharmaceuticals and pharmacy supplies	4,507	5,394	5,334	-1.1	18.3
Toiletries, cosmetics and sundries	856	990	955	-3.6	11.6
Motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and accessories	2,984	10,606	10,139	-4.4	239.8
Motor vehicle	1,649	8,239	7,727	-6.2	368.6
New motor vehicle parts and accessories	1,302	2,296	2,350	2.4	80.6
Used motor vehicle parts and accessories	33	70	62	-12.3	86.1
Building material and supplies	6,694	12,055	13,106	8.7	95.8
Electrical, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning equipment and supplies	2,145	3,102	3,445	11.0	60.6
Metal service centres	1,096	1,942	2,108	8.5	92.3
Lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies	3,453	7,011	7,554	7.8	118.8
Machinery, equipment and supplies	12,162	15,208	15,227	0.1	25.2
Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment	1,577	2,186	2,206	0.9	39.8
Construction, forestry, mining, and industrial machinery, equipment and supplies	3,649	4,604	4,598	-0.1	26.0
Computer and communications equipment and supplies	4,414	4,832	5,012	3.7	13.5
Other machinery, equipment and supplies	2,522	3,586	3,412	-4.8	35.3
Miscellaneous	7,350	9,642	9,314	-3.4	26.7
Recyclable material	636	1,221	1,205	-1.3	89.6
Paper, paper product and disposable plastic product	767	1,049	1,000	-4.6	30.4
Agricultural supplies	2,510	2,816	2,798	-0.7	11.4
Chemical (except agricultural) and allied product	1,410	1,624	1,624	-0.0	15.2
Other miscellaneous	2,027	2,931	2,687	-8.3	32.6

^r revised

^p preliminary

Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.

Source(s): Tables [20-10-0074-01](#) and [20-10-0003-01](#).

Table 2
Wholesale merchants' sales by province and territory – Seasonally adjusted

	April 2020	March 2021 ^r	April 2021 ^p	March to April 2021	April 2020 to April 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Canada	49,032	71,260	71,520	0.4	45.9
Newfoundland and Labrador	266	401	414	3.3	55.6
Prince Edward Island	86	115	128	10.8	49.6
Nova Scotia	670	1,127	1,197	6.2	78.7
New Brunswick	473	683	778	14.0	64.5
Quebec	9,431	14,081	14,347	1.9	52.1
Ontario	22,948	35,755	35,077	-1.9	52.9
Manitoba	1,376	1,658	1,643	-0.9	19.4
Saskatchewan	2,348	2,621	2,572	-1.9	9.5
Alberta	6,307	7,195	7,575	5.3	20.1
British Columbia	5,069	7,576	7,739	2.2	52.7
Yukon	12	16	15	-8.0	20.2
Northwest Territories	34	23	27	19.7	-19.9
Nunavut	13	11	10	-12.0	-21.7

^r revised

^p preliminary

Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.

Source(s): Table [20-10-0074-01](#).

Table 3
Wholesale merchants' inventories by industry – Seasonally adjusted

	April 2020	March 2021 ^r	April 2021 ^p	March to April 2021	April 2020 to April 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total, wholesale inventories	92,228	93,346	93,351	0.0	1.2
Farm product	215	237	254	7.0	18.1
Food, beverage and tobacco	9,845	10,701	10,436	-2.5	6.0
Food	8,684	9,423	9,176	-2.6	5.7
Beverage	555	708	701	-1.0	26.2
Cigarette and tobacco product	417	354	339	-4.2	-18.7
Cannabis	188	216	220	1.9	16.9
Personal and household goods	16,177	16,621	17,172	3.3	6.2
Textile, clothing and footwear	3,703	3,734	3,873 ^E	3.7	4.6
Home entertainment equipment and household appliance	898	898	955	6.3	6.3
Home furnishings	1,258	1,489	1,504	1.0	19.5
Personal goods	1,948 ^E	2,233 ^E	2,375	6.3	21.9
Pharmaceuticals and pharmacy supplies	7,256	7,161	7,363	2.8	1.5
Toiletries, cosmetics and sundries	1,113	1,105	1,101	-0.3	-1.1
Motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and accessories	12,280	11,653	11,758	0.9	-4.2
Motor vehicle	7,132	6,828	7,014	2.7	-1.6
New motor vehicle parts and accessories	5,053	4,725	4,651	-1.6	-8.0
Used motor vehicle parts and accessories	95 ^E	F	F	F	F
Building material and supplies	15,061	15,144	15,943	5.3	5.9
Electrical, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning equipment and supplies	4,517	4,184	4,391	4.9	-2.8
Metal service centres	4,009	3,721	3,910	5.1	-2.5
Lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies	6,534	7,238	7,642	5.6	17.0
Machinery, equipment and supplies	27,189	26,534	25,602	-3.5	-5.8
Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment	6,182	5,647	5,487	-2.8	-11.2
Construction, forestry, mining, and industrial machinery, equipment and supplies	12,856	11,721	11,431	-2.5	-11.1
Computer and communications equipment and supplies	2,703	3,004	3,033	1.0	12.2
Other machinery, equipment and supplies	5,447	6,163	5,652	-8.3	3.8
Miscellaneous	11,461	12,457	12,186	-2.2	6.3
Recyclable material	790	1,479	1,372 ^E	-7.3	73.6
Paper, paper product and disposable plastic product	966	1,079	1,060	-1.7	9.8
Agricultural supplies	4,794	4,812	4,662	-3.1	-2.8
Chemical (except agricultural) and allied product	1,605	1,409	1,439	2.1	-10.4
Other miscellaneous	3,306	3,677	3,653	-0.7	10.5

r revised

p preliminary

E use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.**Source(s):** Table 20-10-0076-01.

Note to readers

All data in this release are seasonally adjusted and expressed in current dollars, unless otherwise noted.

Seasonally-adjusted data are data that have been modified to eliminate the effect of seasonal and calendar influences to allow for more meaningful comparisons of economic conditions from period to period. For more information on seasonal adjustment, see [Seasonally-adjusted data – Frequently asked questions](#).

Trend-cycle estimates are included in selected charts as a complement to the seasonally-adjusted series. These data represent a smoothed version of the [Seasonally-adjusted time series](#) and provide information on longer-term movements including changes in direction underlying the series. For information on trend-cycle data, see [Trend-cycle estimates – Frequently asked questions](#).

Both seasonally-adjusted data and trend-cycle estimates are subject to revision as additional observations become available. These revisions could be large and could even lead to a reversal of movement, especially for reference months near the end of the series or during periods of economic disruptions.

Total wholesale sales expressed in volume are calculated by deflating current dollar values using relevant price indexes. The wholesale sales series in chained (2012) dollars is a chained Fisher volume index, with 2012 as the reference year. For more information, see [Deflation of wholesale sales](#).

The Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey covers all industries within the wholesale trade sector, as defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), with the exception of oilseed and grain merchant wholesalers (NAICS 41112), petroleum and petroleum products merchant wholesalers (NAICS 412) and business-to-business electronic markets, and agents and brokers (NAICS 419).

Real-time data tables

Real-time data tables 20-10-0019-01, 20-10-0020-01 and 20-10-0005-01 will be updated soon.

Next release

Wholesale trade data for May will be released on July 16, 2021.

Available tables: [20-10-0003-01](#), [20-10-0074-01](#) and [20-10-0076-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [2401](#).

The product "[Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey: Interactive Tool](#)" ([71-607-X](#)) is now available online. This product is based on the data published in the tables of the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey: 20-10-0074-01, 20-10-0076-01 and 20-10-0003-01.

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca). For analytical information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Jeff Paul (613-854-2518; jeff.paul@canada.ca), Mining, Manufacturing and Wholesale Trade Division.