

Canadian Health Survey on Seniors, 2020

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From September to December 2020, approximately one-third (31%) of Canadians aged 65 and older reported feeling like they wanted to participate in more social, recreational or group activities.

As of July 2020, nearly one in five Canadians (18%) were aged 65 and older. Information on the health and well-being of older Canadians is important to guide policies and programs that promote healthy aging, especially as the proportion of older adults in Canada is expected to grow.

In 2019 and 2020, Statistics Canada conducted the Canadian Health Survey on Seniors (CHSS) with Canadians aged 65 and older living in the household population to better understand the factors that contribute to healthy aging. New data for the 2020 cycle of the CHSS are now available.

Data from September to December 2020 show that most older Canadians reported the COVID-19 pandemic as the main barrier to social participation

Loneliness can be an important aspect of aging, with implications for the quality of life of older people. From September to December 2020, during the pandemic, 11% of Canadians aged 65 and older reported often feeling isolated from others, lacking companionship or feeling left out. This was an increase from 2019, when 7% reported these feelings of loneliness. In fall 2020, these feelings were much more pronounced among those living alone (18%) than among those not living alone (7%).

Restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic (physical distancing, indoor and outdoor gathering limits, etc.) made it more challenging for Canadians to socialize and participate in group activities. About one in three Canadians aged 65 and older (31%) reported feeling like they wanted to participate in more social, recreational or group activities from September to December 2020. This was higher than in 2019, when approximately one in five (18%) reported the same. Gender and age group differences were apparent, with a higher proportion of women (37%) than men (25%) and a higher proportion of those aged 65 to 84 (32%) than those aged 85 and older (25%) reporting that they wanted to participate in more social activities in the last four months of 2020. Among the 31% of Canadians aged 65 and older who reported wanting to participate in more of these activities, three-quarters (76%) said that various pandemic-related restrictions prevented them from doing so. In 2019, the most commonly reported barriers to social participation were health condition limitations (32%) and being too busy (16%).

Older Canadians receive less informal assistance from family, friends or neighbours during the pandemic

In addition to influencing social participation, public health measures that aimed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 may have also had an impact on older Canadians living in private households who needed short- or long-term assistance because of a health condition or limitation that affected their daily activities (personal and medical care, home maintenance, transportation, etc.). Such measures, including discouraging in-person contact between people from different households, may have had an impact on the amount of informal assistance that older Canadians were able to receive from family, friends or neighbours.

From September to December 2020, 14% of Canadians aged 65 and older reported that they received such informal assistance in the year preceding the survey; this was lower than in 2019 (18%). Older Canadians who lived alone (19%) were more likely than those living with others (12%) to report receiving informal care in fall 2020. Among those who received assistance, 42% reported that most of the assistance was provided by a person living in the same household, compared with 58% who reported that it came from a person living outside their household.

Compared with 2019, there was no statistically significant change in the proportion of older Canadians receiving informal personal care or help with meal preparation or delivery in fall 2020. However, there was a decrease in the proportion of older Canadians receiving help with transportation (13% versus 9%); with housework, home maintenance or outdoor work (11% compared with 9%); and with managing care such as making appointments (6% versus 4%).



Patterns of assistance received differed by gender, age group and level of functional impairment with activities of daily living. Among Canadians aged 65 and older, more women (18%) than men (10%) reported that they received informal assistance in fall 2020. Among those aged 85 and older, 38% reported receiving informal assistance; this proportion was over three times higher than that of people aged 65 to 84 (11%). Most older Canadians with severe functional impairment with activities of daily living (87%) reported receiving informal assistance, compared with those with moderate, mild or no functional impairment (12%). Compared with 2019, there was no statistically significant change in the percentage of people receiving informal care among those with severe functional impairment.

Note to readers

The estimate of the number of older Canadians is taken from the table [Population estimates on July 1st, by age and sex](#).

Although data for both 2019 and 2020 are from the Canadian Health Survey on Seniors (CHSS), the 2020 cycle of the survey had some differences. In March 2020, collection for the CHSS was paused and did not resume until September 2020—at which point the collection periods transitioned from three months to five weeks. In-person interviews were also halted and collection was done only via telephone interviews. All this had an impact on the number of cases that were collected. The data for 2020 represent the combination of the January-to-March and September-to-December data.

For the data from both the 2019 and 2020 CHSS cycles, survey weights were adjusted to minimize any potential bias that could arise from survey non-response; non-response adjustments and calibration using available auxiliary information were applied and are reflected in the survey weights provided with the data file. Extensive validations of survey estimates were also performed and examined from a bias analysis perspective. Despite these rigorous adjustments and validations, the higher non-response rate increases the risk of remaining bias and the magnitude of the potential impact of such a bias on estimates produced using the survey data. While the comparisons between 2020 and 2019 are valid, users should keep in mind the risk of bias when interpreting these results. See the recent [StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada](#) article based on data from the 2020 Canadian Community Health Survey (of which the CHSS is a subsample) for additional information.

Respondents were asked whether they felt like they wanted to participate in more social, recreational or group activities in the 12 months preceding the survey. The question did not explicitly mention in-person activities.

Respondents were asked whether, during the 12 months preceding the survey, they received informal home care (short-term or long-term assistance from family, friends or neighbours) because of a health condition or limitation that affects their daily life.

In this release, when two estimates are said to be different, this indicates that the difference was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (p -value less than 5%).

For more information on survey definitions and methods, refer to the Statistics Canada survey information page [Canadian Health Survey on Seniors](#).

Available tables: [13-10-0788-01](#) and [13-10-0789-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5267](#).

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) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).