

Families, households and marital status: Key results from the 2016 Census

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The 2016 Census data show that, today, proportionally fewer households are composed of a 'mom, dad and kids' family and more people are living alone, as part of a couple without children, or as part of a multigenerational family.

Canadians' lives at home have evolved since Confederation, when large rural families consisting of a married couple and several children were common. In 1871, there were on average 5.6 people per household, a ratio that dropped to 2.4 by 2016.

These changes are the results of demographic shifts, such as population aging and increasing ethnocultural diversity, as well as social, economic and legislative changes. The evolving living arrangements and families of Canadians can also have consequences, for example on the housing market, on caregiving and care receiving and on intergenerational relationships.

Today, Statistics Canada is releasing the third series of data from the 2016 Census. This release focuses on families, households, marital status, and language. The data provide a portrait of a country where diverse living arrangements have replaced the family models of the past.

Through the years, the census has been used as a barometer to accurately capture changes in Canadian households and families. It measured common-law unions for the first time in 1981, same-sex couples in 2001, and foster children and stepfamilies in 2011. Census data help governments respond to changes in the lives of Canadians, by putting in place policies such as the Universal Child Care Benefit and Old Age Security.

Statistics Canada will publish all of the 2016 Census data in 2017 according to the [2016 Census Program release schedule](#).

The percentage of one-person households now at a high in Canada's 150-year history

There were 14.1 million private households in Canada in 2016, 9.5 million (67.7%) of which were composed of at least one census family. Census families are defined as married or common-law couples, with or without children, and lone-parent families.



Infographic 1 – Overview of household types, Canada, 2016



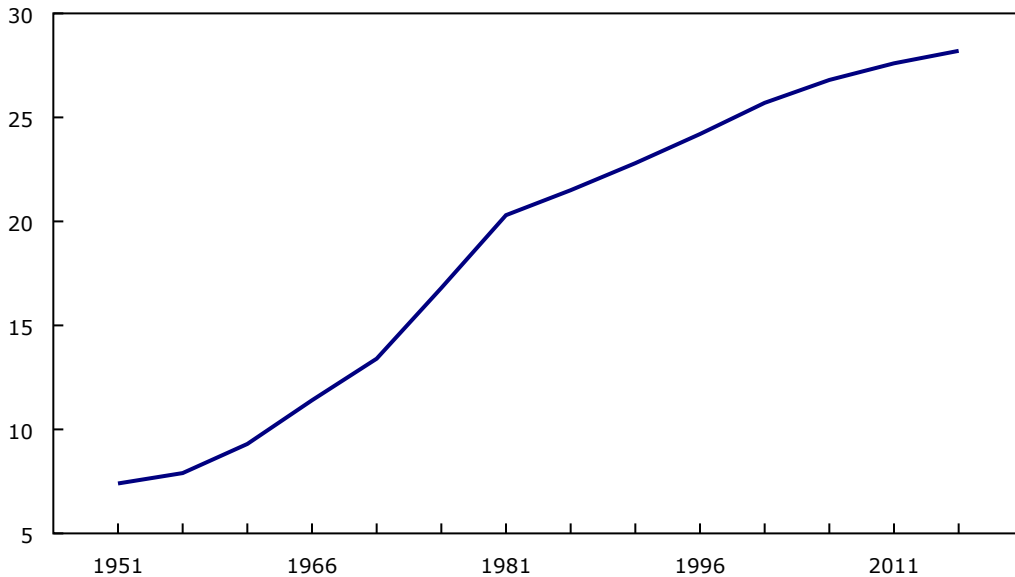
One-person households accounted for 28.2% of all households in 2016—the highest share since Confederation in 1867.

One-person households became the most common type of household for the first time in 2016, surpassing couples with children, which were down from 31.5% of all households in 2001 to 26.5% in 2016. In comparison, the percentage of one-person households was 25.7% in 2001.

At the time of Confederation few people lived alone, and the vast majority of households were family households. Since 1951, the percentage of households comprised of just one person increased steadily, from 7.4% to 28.2% in 2016. Looking at it another way, in 2016, 13.9% of the Canadian population aged 15 and over lived alone, compared with 1.8% in 1951.

Chart 1 Percentage of one-person households, Canada, 1951 to 2016

percentage



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1951 to 2016.

Besides one-person households and households comprised of at least one census family, a small share (4.1%) of households were comprised of two or more persons who were not members of a census family, such as roommates or siblings living together.

A number of social, economic and demographic factors have contributed to the rise in the number of people living alone. For example, income redistribution, pensions and the increased presence of women in the workforce have led to more people being economically independent today than in the past, especially in older age groups.

In addition, higher separation and divorce rates have led to more people living alone instead of in couples. Finally, population aging and higher life expectancy have also contributed to the increase in one-person households, given that a larger share of seniors live alone as compared to other age groups.

Living alone also on the rise in other countries

Canada's percentage of one-person households (28.2%) was similar to that of the United States (27.5% in 2012) and the United Kingdom (28.5% in 2014) but lower than that of many other industrialized countries.

Over one-third of households in France (33.8% in 2011) and Japan (34.5% in 2015) had one resident. The percentages were still higher in Sweden (36.2% in 2011), Norway (40.0% in 2012) and Germany (41.4% in 2015).

Living alone has decreased among senior women in recent years

More women than men are living alone, with women accounting for 53.7% of one-person households in 2016.

Among seniors (people aged 65 and older), about one-third (33.0%) of women were living alone in 2016, compared with 17.5% of men. However, the proportion of senior women living alone was down compared with 2001 (38.3%), while that of senior women living in a couple (married or common-law) rose, from 44.4% in 2001 to 51.4% in 2016.

This trend was even more striking among women aged 80 and older: the share of those living as part of a couple increased from 19.9% in 2001 to 27.6% in 2016, while the share of those living alone decreased from 56.1% to 48.6%.

Senior women are more likely to live alone than senior men. They have a higher life expectancy and they also tend to marry men older than themselves. As a result, they are more often widowed than senior men. However, since the 1970s, men have seen larger gains in their life expectancy and this has led to couples living together longer.

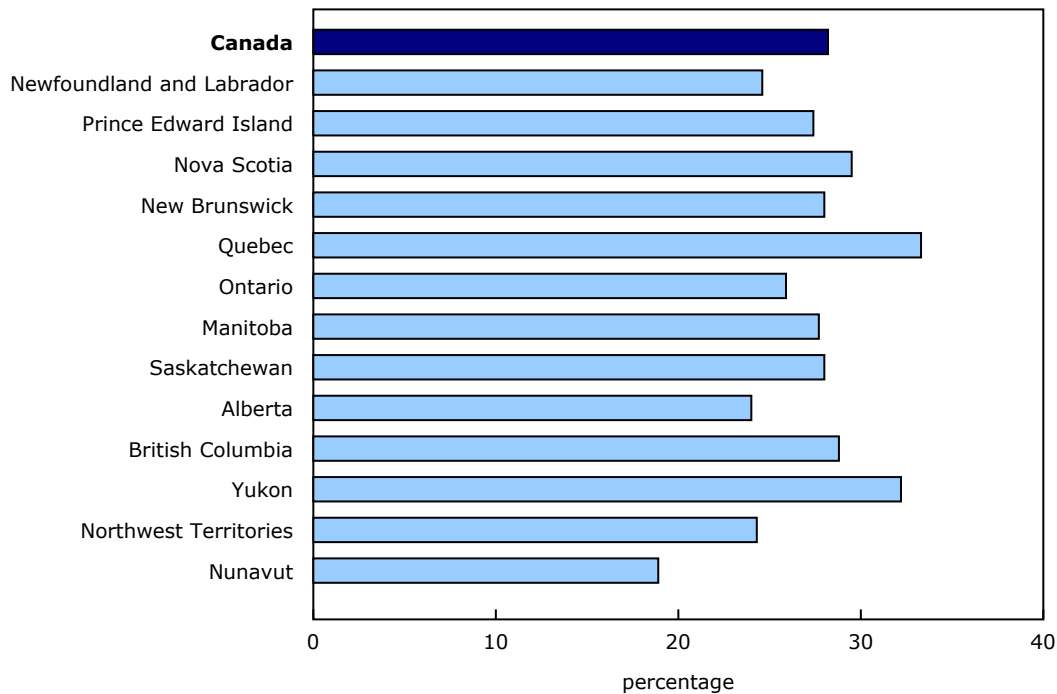
One-person households most common in Quebec and Yukon

In Quebec in 2016, one-third (33.3%) of households were comprised of one person, the highest level of all the provinces and territories. Yukon followed closely at 32.2%. Since 2001, Quebec and Yukon have consistently recorded the highest shares of one-person households.

The proportions of one-person households in Nova Scotia (29.5%) and British Columbia (28.8%) were also higher than the national average (28.2%).

In contrast, Nunavut had the lowest share of one-person households (18.9%). Among the provinces, Alberta (24.0%) had the lowest proportion, followed closely by Newfoundland and Labrador (24.6%).

Chart 2
Percentage of one-person households, Canada, provinces and territories, 2016



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

From 2001 to 2016, the share of one-person households increased the most in the Atlantic provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador (+36.4%), New Brunswick (+24.9%), Prince Edward Island (+20.2%) and Nova Scotia (+19.4%). By comparison, the proportion of one-person households rose 9.6% nationally over the same period.

The stronger increase in the Atlantic provinces is likely related to the faster aging of the population in this region. Nearly one-fifth (19.8%) of all people in the Atlantic provinces were aged 65 and older in 2016, compared with 16.9% for Canada as a whole.

A [map](#) showing the proportions of one-person households by census division also provides a picture of the differences within and among the provinces and territories.

Number of couples without children growing faster than those with children

Trends in the share of couples living with or without children also reflect the growing diversity of households and families in Canada.

From 2011 to 2016, the number of couples living without children rose faster (+7.2%) than the number of couples with children (+2.3%). As a result, the share of couples living with at least one child fell from 56.7% in 2011 to 51.1% in 2016—the lowest level on record.

The proportion of couples living with children has been decreasing for some time. This is mostly due to population aging. As the large baby-boom generation—people born from 1946 to 1965—grows older, more and more couples are becoming empty nesters due to their children leaving home.

However, this trend has been partly offset by an increasing share of young adults living with their parents over the last four decades. The article, "[Young adults living with their parents in Canada in 2016](#)," part of the *Census in Brief* series, provides more information on recent trends and regional differences among young adults living with their parents.

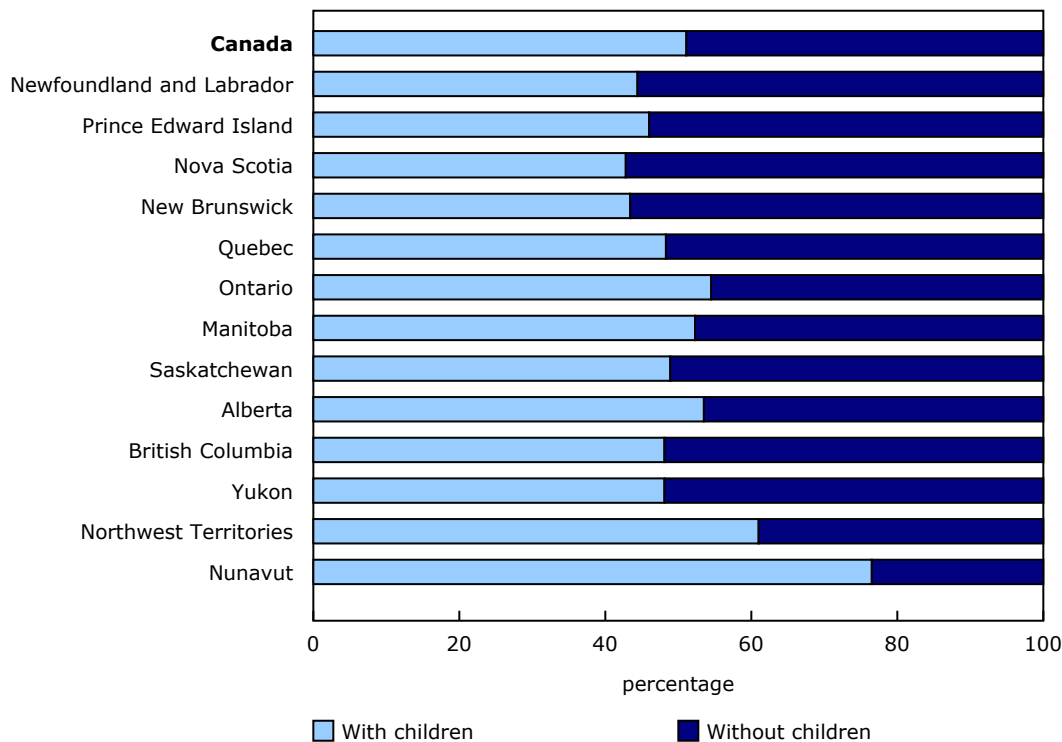
More information on families with children in Canada is available in the article, "[Portrait of children's family life in Canada in 2016](#)," part of the *Census in Brief* series. This article provides an overview of the diverse family situations of children aged 0 to 14 in Canada.

There are more couples living with children than without in some regions of the country

The proportions of couples with or without children were noticeably different between Eastern and Western Canada, reflecting differences in population growth and population aging. (For more information on population growth and aging, see *The Daily* for [February 8](#) and [May 3, 2017](#).)

In 2016, the proportion of couples with children was the highest in Nunavut (76.5%) and the Northwest Territories (61.0%), followed by Ontario (54.5%), Alberta (53.5%) and Manitoba (52.3%). These proportions were all above the national average of 51.1%.

Chart 3
Percentage of couples with or without children, Canada, provinces and territories, 2016



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

From 2011 to 2016, the number of couples with children grew the most in the Prairie provinces, and in Nunavut and Yukon, partly as a result of higher fertility. The increase in Alberta was also attributable to young adults migrating from other parts of the country.

In contrast, the number of couples with children declined in the Atlantic provinces during the same five-year period, while it was unchanged in Quebec. The Atlantic provinces also recorded the lowest shares of couples with children in 2016, ranging from 42.8% in Nova Scotia to 46.0% in Prince Edward Island.

Common-law unions still increasing

Married couples represented the majority of couples in 2016, although common-law unions are becoming more frequent in every province and territory. In 2016, over one-fifth of all couples (21.3%) were living common law, more than three times the share in 1981 (6.3%).

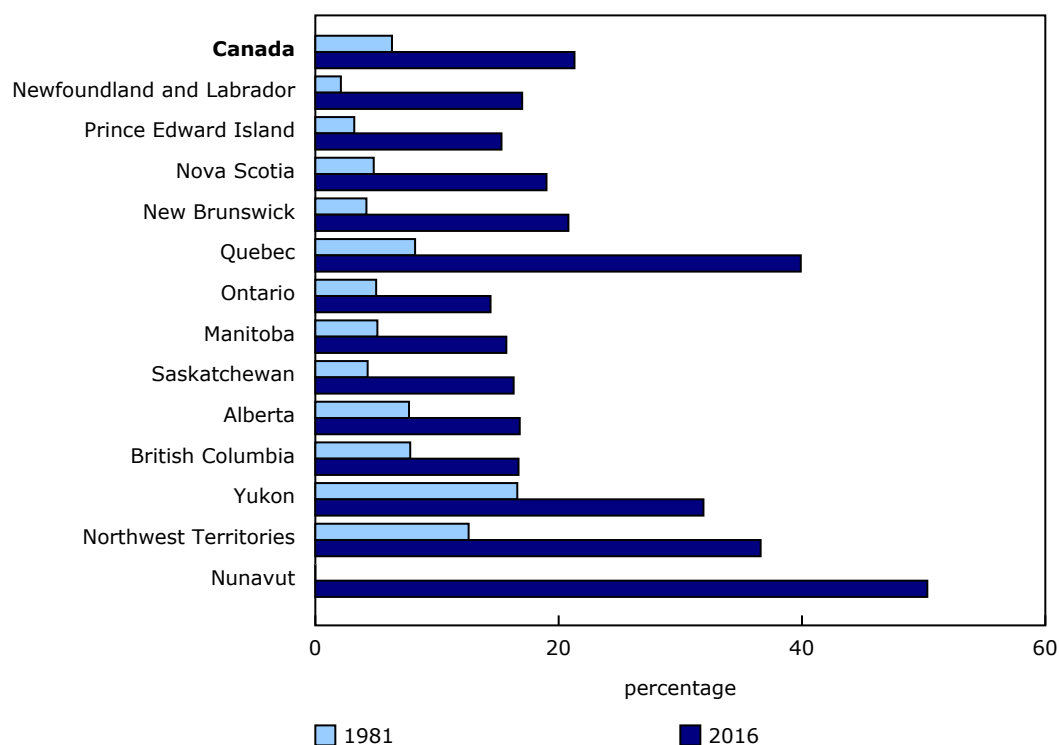
The proportion of couples living common law was higher in Canada than in the United States, where 5.9% of couples were in non-marital cohabiting unions (in 2010). The proportion in Canada was also slightly higher than in the United Kingdom (20.0% in 2015), but lower than in France (22.6% in 2011), Norway (23.9% in 2011) and Sweden (29.0% in 2010).

Highest proportions of common-law unions in Nunavut and Quebec

The proportion of couples living common law has increased everywhere in Canada since 1981, the first year for which census data on common-law unions were collected.

In 2016, Quebec (39.9%) and the three territories—Nunavut (50.3%), Northwest Territories (36.6%) and Yukon (31.9%)—had the highest proportions of common-law unions, considerably above the average for the rest of Canada (15.7%, excluding Quebec and the three territories). The proportions in Quebec and the territories were also higher than those in countries with high shares of common-law couples, such as Sweden.

Chart 4
Percentage of common-law unions, Canada, provinces and territories, 1981 and 2016



Note(s): Nunavut was part of the Northwest Territories in 1981.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1981 and 2016.

Not only is the share of common-law unions high in Quebec, but it has also risen faster in Quebec in the last few decades. The share of common-law unions in Quebec was only slightly higher than the national average in 1981 (8.2% versus 6.3%), but was nearly twice as high in 2016 (39.9% versus 21.3%).

From 2011 to 2016, the percentage of couples living common law increased faster in Nunavut (+4.7 percentage points) and Quebec (+2.1) as compared with Canada as a whole (+1.4).

In 2016, there were also proportionally more couples with children in Nunavut (49.5%), Quebec (42.7%), the Northwest Territories (33.4%) and Yukon (27.1%) living common law than in the rest of Canada (11.7%, excluding Quebec and the three territories).

The article, "[Same-sex Couples in 2016 in Canada](#)," part of the *Census in Brief* series, provides additional information on same-sex couples in Canada, including those living common law and those who are married.

Multigenerational households are the fastest growing type of household

In 2016, the proportion of multigenerational households—households that include at least three generations of the same family—was only 2.9% (403,810 households). However, from 2001 to 2016, multigenerational households rose the fastest (+37.5%) of all household types, well above the increase of 21.7% for all households. In 2016, 6.3% of Canada's population living in private households, or 2.2 million people, lived in a multigenerational household.

The increase in multigenerational households may be partly attributed to Canada's changing ethnocultural composition. This type of living arrangement is more common among Aboriginal and immigrant populations, which account for a growing share of Canada's population. The higher number of multigenerational households may also be related to housing needs and the high cost of living in some regions of the country.

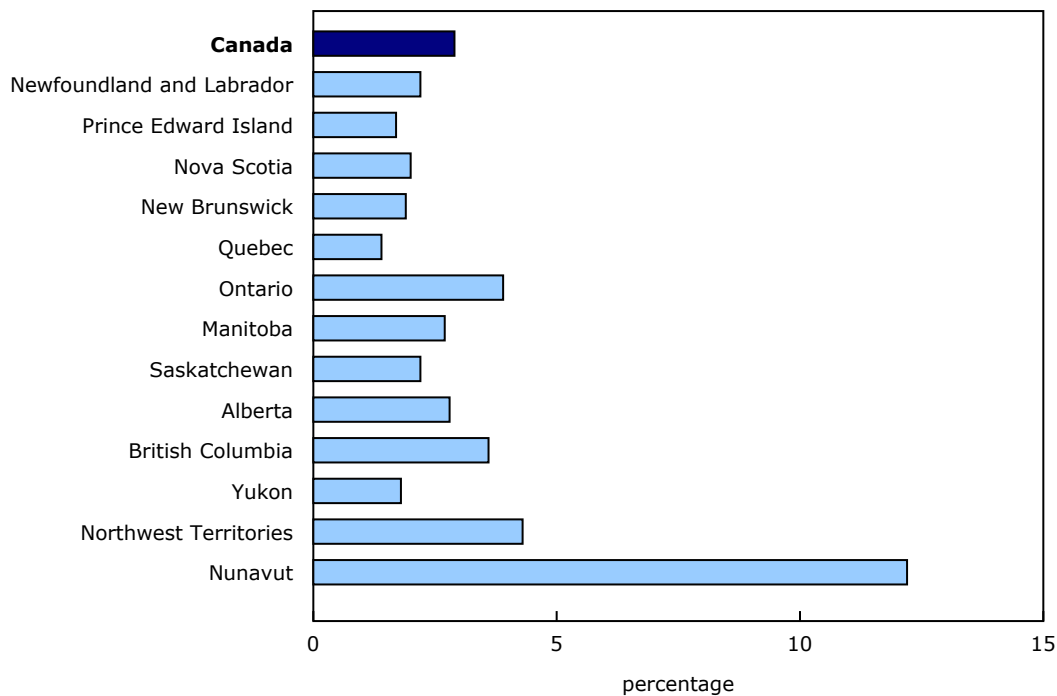
Non-census-family households of two or more persons, such as roommates or siblings living together, and other family households (two or more census families living together or one census family living with other people, after excluding multigenerational households) also rose sharply. Together, these two household types accounted for 7.8% of all private households in 2016, and 10.1% of Canada's population in private households.

One in eight households in Nunavut is multigenerational

In 2016, multigenerational households were most common in Nunavut (12.2%) and the Northwest Territories (4.3%), where there are large Aboriginal communities, as well as in Ontario (3.9%) and British Columbia (3.6%), the two provinces with the highest proportions of immigrants.

Multigenerational households were least common in Quebec, accounting for less than 2% of private households in the province. In contrast, as shown earlier, Quebec had the highest percentage of one-person households among the provinces and territories.

Chart 5
Percentage of multigenerational households, Canada, provinces and territories, 2016



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

The share of multigenerational households was also relatively high in some large urban centres (census metropolitan areas [CMAs]) of the country such as Abbotsford–Mission (7.6%), Toronto (5.8%), Vancouver (4.8%), Oshawa (4.3%) and Barrie (3.9%). The ethnocultural diversity in these urban centres is higher than in the rest of the country.

Note to readers

Definitions

In this data release on families, households and marital status of the 2016 Census, private households and the population in private households are included in the analysis and the population in collective dwellings is excluded.

Also in this data release of the 2016 Census, census family households of either a couple with or without children or a lone-parent family are households with only one census family and no other persons. This is a slight modification from the release on families and households of the 2011 Census. In that release, one-family households included both one-family households without additional persons and those with additional persons. This change reflects the United Nations' principles and recommendations for population and housing censuses regarding the classification of households. As a result of the change, households containing a single census family plus other persons are now included either with 'multigenerational households' or 'other family households'. These new household type categories are published back to 2001.

The following data sources were used for international comparisons of one-person households: United States Census Bureau. 2012; Office for National Statistics. United Kingdom. 2014; Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques. France. 2011; Statistics Bureau, Japan. 2015; Statistics Sweden. 2011; Statistisches Bundesamt. Germany. 2015; Statistics Norway. 2012.

Please refer to the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](#), Catalogue no. 98-301-X, for additional information on the census variables.

2016 Census of Population products and releases

Today, Statistics Canada is releasing the third set of results from the 2016 Census of Population. These results focus on households and families in Canada, describing recent trends related to living arrangements of Canadians including young adults and seniors, family situations of children, and same-sex couples. Regional differences are also described when relevant. Results on [language](#) are also being released today.

Census results show to what extent Canadian families are becoming more diverse. These trends have many implications, including on children's well-being, social support and isolation, income security, and housing needs, among other things.

Several 2016 Census products are also available today on the [Census Program](#) web module. This module has been designed to provide easy access to census data, free of charge. Information is organized into broad categories, including analytical products, data products, reference materials, geography and a video centre.

[Analytical products](#) include three articles from the *Census in Brief* series. These articles provide analyses focusing on current population issues involving challenges that are relevant from a public policy perspective. The first article focuses on the family situations of children living in lone-parent families, in stepfamilies or without their parents in 2016. The second article provides a demographic portrait of young adults living with their parents in 2016. The third article presents a demographic portrait of same-sex couples in Canada in 2016.

[Data products](#) include families, households and marital status results for a wide range of standard geographic areas, available through the [Census Profile](#), [Data tables](#) and [Highlight tables](#).

In addition, the [Focus on Geography Series](#) provides data and highlights on key topics found in this Daily release and in the *Census in Brief* articles at various levels of geography.

[Reference materials](#) contain information to help understand census data. They include the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2016](#), which summarizes key aspects of the census, as well as response rates and other data quality information. They also include the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](#), which defines census concepts and variables, and the [Families Reference Guide](#), which explains census concepts and changes made to the 2016 Census. This reference guide also includes information about data quality and historical comparability, and comparisons with other data sources. Both the *Dictionary* and the *Guide to the Census of Population* are updated with additional information throughout the release cycle.

Geography-related 2016 Census Program products and services can be found under [Geography](#). This includes [GeoSearch](#), an interactive mapping tool, and [thematic maps](#), which show data on families and households for various standard geographic areas.

A video providing an overview of Canadian families of yesterday and today is available from the [Video centre](#).

An infographic entitled [Portrait of households and families in Canada, 2016 Census of Population](#) also illustrates some key findings on families and households in Canada, provinces and territories.

The public is also invited to [chat with an expert](#) about this release, on Friday, August 4, 2017, from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m., Eastern Time.

Over the coming months, Statistics Canada will continue to release results from the 2016 Census of Population, and provide an even more comprehensive picture of the Canadian population. Please see the [2016 Census Program release schedule](#) to find out when data and analysis on the different topics will be released throughout 2017.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3901](#).

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).