

Sense of meaning and purpose in Canada, October to December 2021

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About 6 in 10 Canadians aged 15 years and older reported having a strong sense of meaning and purpose, according to new data from the Canadian Social Survey (October to December 2021 wave).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on Canadians' personal well-being. For example, [mental health declined with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels by July 2021](#). Likewise, [life satisfaction was sharply lower in June 2020 compared with 2018](#).

[Mental health and life satisfaction registered similar drops in the United Kingdom in the first year of the pandemic](#). Another dimension of personal well-being, "sense of meaning and purpose," also dipped in 2020 in the United Kingdom. Having a strong, positive sense of meaning and purpose means feeling like the things done in life are worthwhile. Over 2020, the massive labour market disruptions and restrictions on social interactions may have contributed to a feeling that life's activities were not as meaningful as they had seemed to be previously.

This release presents the first results on sense of meaning and purpose for Canada, measured from October to December 2021. These figures will provide an important baseline for tracking Canadians' sense of meaning and purpose in the future.

A higher share of women report a strong sense of meaning and purpose

In late 2021, 59% of the population aged 15 years and older in Canada's provinces reported having a strong sense of meaning and purpose, meaning they said they felt strongly that the things they do in life are worthwhile. This share was 61% among women and 57% among men.

Sense of meaning and purpose in the Canadian Social Survey is measured with the question "Using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means 'Not at all' and 10 means 'Completely', to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Responses of 8, 9 or 10 are used in this study to indicate having "a strong sense of meaning and purpose."

Higher shares of rural residents and people living in Quebec report a strong sense of meaning and purpose

Rural residents (69%) felt more strongly that the things they do in life are worthwhile compared with urban residents (58%).

Quebec was home to the largest proportion of those reporting a strong sense of meaning and purpose, with about two-thirds (67%) of the Quebec population indicating, in the period from October to December 2021, feeling that the things they do in life are worthwhile. After Quebec, the highest shares of those with a strong sense of meaning and purpose were in the Atlantic region (61%), followed by Ontario (58%), the Prairies (56%) and British Columbia (53%). Results for Quebec are consistent with other personal well-being statistics which show that [Quebecers reported relatively more positive mental health and life satisfaction in 2019 and 2020](#).

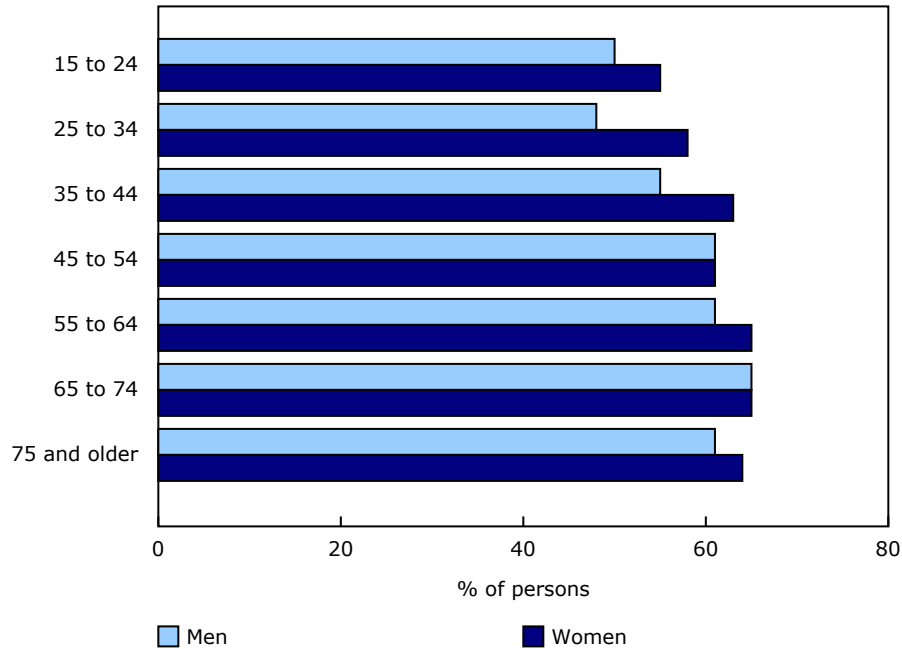
Having a strong sense of meaning and purpose generally increases with age

Having a strong sense of meaning and purpose differed by age group. In particular, a larger share of older people reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose.



To illustrate, in October through December 2021, nearly two-thirds (65%) of seniors aged 65 to 74 reported having a strong sense of meaning and purpose, while just over half of the population aged 15 to 24 (52%) reported the same. Further research could help to show whether other characteristics of seniors, such as whether they have grandchildren, employment, hobbies or participate regularly in activities or volunteer work, influence their sense of meaning and purpose.

Chart 1
A strong sense of meaning and purpose, by gender and age group, population aged 15 years and older, 2021



Note(s): The difference between men and women is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) among the "25 to 34" and "35 to 44" age groups.
Source(s): Canadian Social Survey – Well-being, Unpaid Work and Family Time, 2021 (5354).

A higher share of people who are in a couple report a strong sense of meaning and purpose

People who were in a couple (64%), that is, either married or living common-law, were more likely to report a strong sense of meaning and purpose compared with those who were not in a couple (52%) (i.e., those who were single, separated, divorced or widowed).

Additionally, a smaller proportion of individuals living alone (51%) reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose, compared with those who were living with at least one other person (60%).

Further research could examine these differences by family type and size. For example, it may be that some of the differences could be explained by the age group of the adults, or by whether children are present in the household.

Fewer than half of LGBTQ2+ Canadians report a strong sense of meaning and purpose

In late 2021, 40% of LGBTQ2+ people (people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, Two-Spirit, or persons reporting another diverse gender or sexual orientation identity) reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose compared with 61% of those who are not LGBTQ2+.

More specifically, focusing on sexual orientation, 48% of lesbian or gay people and 40% of bisexual people reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose. Numbers for people who indicated another sexual orientation were too small to be reported separately.

Differences between LGBTQ2+ people and others may partially reflect the dynamics of characteristics such as age group, marital status and geographic area of residence in relation to meaning and purpose. For example, age group may be a factor in this finding as two-thirds (66%) of people who reported being LGBTQ2+ were under the age of 35, compared with just under one-third (31%) of the total population of Canada. Likewise LGBTQ2+ people are more likely to live in urban areas, where smaller shares of Canadians reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose.

Fewer than half of people who report a disability, difficulty or long-term condition report a strong sense of meaning and purpose

Those who reported having a disability, difficulty or long-term condition were less likely to report a strong sense of meaning and purpose. Overall, just under one-half of individuals aged 15 years and older with a disability, difficulty or long-term condition reported having a strong sense of meaning and purpose (49%). This compared with 67% of those without a disability, difficulty or long-term condition. Just over one-third of people with an emotional, psychological or mental health condition reported having a strong sense of meaning and purpose (35%).

Fewer than 3 in 10 Canadians with fair or poor mental health report feeling strongly that the things they do in life are worthwhile

People in Canada who perceived themselves as healthy were more likely to report a strong sense of meaning and purpose. More than 7 in 10 people who said they had excellent or very good overall health also reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose (72%) in the period from October to December 2021. Conversely, among those who perceived their health as being fair or poor, just over 3 in 10 reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose (34%).

Unsurprisingly, there is also a close connection between mental health and the feeling that life's activities are, or are not, worthwhile. In terms of mental health, nearly 8 in 10 people who felt that they had excellent or very good mental health reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose (79%).

In contrast, 26% of people who reported having fair or poor mental health reported feeling strongly that the things they do in life are worthwhile.

A sense of meaning and purpose and overall life satisfaction are central to having a good quality of life

Having a strong sense of meaning and purpose often goes hand-in-hand with having high life satisfaction.

More than 8 in 10 of those who reported high life satisfaction also reported a strong sense of meaning and purpose (84%).

In Canada, as well as internationally, sense of meaning and purpose and life satisfaction are considered to be important personal well-being indicators. In the United Kingdom, where sense of meaning and purpose is measured using the same survey question, to which people respond with a rating on a scale of 0 to 10, the average rating for sense of meaning and purpose was 7.4 between April 2020 and March 2021. In Canada, the average rating was 7.2 in late 2021.

Sense of meaning and purpose and life satisfaction are key indicators in Canada's new Quality of Life Framework

Statistics Canada, in partnership with the Department of Finance Canada and the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada, is leading work to develop and share data and insights on quality of life in Canada. Stay tuned for further releases focusing on quality of life and well-being in Canada.

Sense of meaning and purpose is an indicator in the recently established [Quality of Life Framework](#). The Framework will be used to identify future policy priorities and build on previous actions to improve evidence-based decision-making and budgeting at the federal level. This is the first release of data on sense of meaning and purpose from Statistics Canada. Data have been collected in the Canadian Social Survey to fill a gap, as Statistics Canada has not collected this information in the past.

Today, Statistics Canada is also launching Canada's Quality of Life Hub, an online portal for all information and data related to the Quality of Life Framework. The purpose of the Hub is to bring together key economic, social and environmental datasets to support the measurement of Canadians' quality of life. The Hub includes quality of life indicators, definitions, metadata and data as well as relevant releases and data products. Today, Statistics Canada is pleased to share a first static version of the Quality of Life Hub which presents the Framework's 20 headline indicators that aim to provide a high-level assessment of quality of life in Canada.

Do you have ideas or thoughts on what you'd like to see in the Hub? Visit Canada's [Quality of Life Hub](#) today and send us your ideas and feedback! Your input will be invaluable as we continue to develop the Quality of Life Hub in 2022 and beyond.

Note to readers

The data in this release are from the third wave of the [Canadian Social Survey – Well-being, unpaid work and family time](#), for which data were collected from October 26 to December 7, 2021. The goal of the Canadian Social Survey program is to understand social issues rapidly by conducting surveys on different topics every three months. Statistics Canada would like to thank all Canadians who took the time to answer the questions during this time of crisis.

The results of the Canadian Social Survey – Well-being, unpaid work and family time will provide important information about paid and unpaid work, family time, changes in the household, intentions to have children and other topics, including life satisfaction and meaning and purpose which are key quality of life indicators. Released analyses will provide important information about the well-being of people in Canada and help decision makers develop programs and policies to better serve all Canadians.

The target population for this voluntary survey is all non-institutionalized persons 15 years of age and older, living off reserve in Canada's 10 provinces. Statistics Canada collects the statistical information by either inviting a respondent to self-respond to an electronic questionnaire, or by having an interviewer contact a respondent to collect the information using the computer-assisted telephone interviewing method.

Respondents were included in the LGBTQ2+ population based on self-reported information derived from their sexual orientation, sex assigned at birth and current gender.

Survey respondents were classified as having high life satisfaction if they chose 8, 9 or 10 on a scale of 0 to 10 when asked the question "How do you feel about your life as a whole right now?," where 0 meant "Very dissatisfied" and 10 meant "Very satisfied."

Available tables: [13-10-0843-01](#) to [13-10-0848-01](#) and [45-10-0048-01](#) to [45-10-0053-01](#) .

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5354](#).

The infographic "[Sense of meaning and purpose in Canada](#)," which is part of *Statistics Canada — Infographics (11-627-M)*, is now available.

The interactive dashboard "[Selected indicators of quality of life in Canada](#)," which is part of *Statistics Canada – Data visualization products (71-607-X)*, is also available. The tool allows users to explore data for six quality of life indicators, including sense of meaning and purpose and life satisfaction, by province, gender, age group, and other sociodemographic characteristics.

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).