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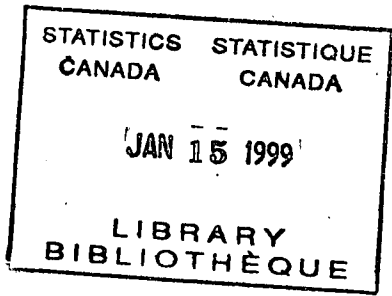
FOCUS ON CANADA

Catalogue 98-121

**CANADA'S  
SENIORS**

Canada





1986 Census of Canada

## CANADA'S SENIORS



by Leroy Stone and Hubert Frenken

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## PREFACE

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**T**he 1986 Census of Canada provided, as did all the previous censuses, a rich source of information on individual, family and household characteristics of Canadians. The census data allow individual researchers as well as academic, business, cultural, social and governmental organizations to undertake in-depth enquiries and analyses on those social issues which interest and concern them.

This study is part of the 1986 Focus on Canada Series. The series is a modest effort by Statistics Canada to provide overviews of a wide variety of subjects on which the 1986 Census collected information. The studies have been written by experts, both inside and outside Statistics Canada, in non-technical language supported by simple tables and attractive charts. The topics include demographic characteristics (population, families, farmers, youth, seniors, the disabled), socio-cultural characteristics (ethnicity, language, education), and economic characteristics (women in the labour force, affordability of housing, occupational trends, employment income, family income).

The present study on "Canada's Seniors" was authored by Leroy Stone and Hubert Frenken of Population Studies Division in Statistics Canada.

I would like to express my appreciation to the authors, to the reviewers and to the staff of the Bureau involved in managing and producing this series.

We hope that the studies in Focus on Canada Series will not only provide Canadians with very useful information on various facets of the Canadian society, but will also be an inducement for them to undertake further research on the topics.

Ivan P. Fellegi  
Chief Statistician of Canada

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## HIGHLIGHTS

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- The speed of population aging quickened in the decade that ended with the 1986 Census, when nearly 10.7% of Canadians were aged 65 and over. This figure represented an increase of almost two percentage points over the value for 1976. In contrast, it took 30 years (1946 to 1976) for the percentage of Canadians aged 65 or over to increase by only 1.6 percentage points.
- Canada has begun to catch up with the world leaders with regard to the degree of maturity of its population age structure. Since 1970, the gap in the percentage of population aged 65 and over between Canada and the United States has begun to close. Furthermore, there are indications that Canada is starting to catch up even more rapidly to Western European countries. Among developed countries, Canada is possibly a leader in terms of the growth rate of the population aged 80 and over.
- Just over 4% of Canadians (about one million persons) were aged 75 and over in 1986. Leading the provinces, in the percentage of persons aged 75 and over, was Prince Edward Island, with 5.4% in 1986. Not far behind, with values above 5%, were Manitoba and Saskatchewan. British Columbia and Nova Scotia followed closely with values just below 5%.
- Despite the high growth rates for the older population, the fastest recent (1981-1986) growth rate shown by any five-year age group was that in a group through which members of the Baby Boom Generation were passing. A 4.9% average annual growth rate took place in the age category 35-39 between 1981 and 1986. This was closely followed by a 4.1% average annual growth rate for the age category 40-44 between 1981 and 1986. Survivors of the age group 40-44 in 1986 will break into the current prime ages for retirement in the first decade of the next century.
- Women outnumbered men by more than two to one in the 85-and-over age group for the first time in 1981. The imbalance between the sexes at this age deepened between 1981 and 1986, when there were only 44 men per 100 women aged 85 and over.
- The proportion widowed among those who had ever been married (the widowhood ratio) in the population aged 65 and over has been declining since 1966. Between 1976 and 1986, the widowhood ratio for women aged 65 and over decreased from 56% to 53% and that for similarly aged men from 17% to 15%. In 1966, nearly four in ten women aged 65-69 who had ever been married were widowed, but by 1986 this figure had fallen to just below one-third.

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- The proportion of married persons at the older ages has been steadily rising during the past 20 years. Among women aged 65 and over the percentage married increased from 39% to 41% between 1976 and 1986. The corresponding values for men of similar age were 74% and 77%.
  - Seniors live alone in greater and greater numbers, to the point where one out of every four Canadians aged 65 and over lived alone in 1986. For those between the ages of 65 and 84, however, the increase in the proportion living alone slowed from the 1976-1981 to the 1981-1986 time periods. In contrast, for those aged 85 and over no such slowdown occurred. Of women aged 85 and over in 1986, 28% lived alone, an increase of nearly three percentage points over the figure recorded in 1981.
  - The proportion of seniors below age 85 that are residents of institutions has been declining in recent years. For example, among women aged 80-84 the rate of institutionalization decreased from 18% in 1981 to 17% in 1986. Among both widowed men and women aged 85 and over, however, the rates of institutionalization increased between 1981 and 1986, from 40% to over 41% for widows and from 35% to greater than 37% for widowers.
  - There are significant provincial differences in the rates of occupancy of institutional residences by Canada's seniors. In Alberta, nearly 51% of widows aged 85 and over were residents of institutions in 1986. British Columbia had 44% of its widows in this age group living in institutions, while Manitoba's rate was 40%. Prince Edward Island, despite its highly mature age structure, at least in comparison to the rest of Canada, had only 36% of its widowed women aged 85 and over in institutions. In Manitoba, the rate of institutionalization of widows in this age group remained the same in 1986 as in 1981.



## INTRODUCTION

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**T**he 1986 Census of Canada results show that the pace of population aging has accelerated in Canada during the last decade, if by "population aging" one means an increase in the percentage of Canadians who are at least 65 years old. In this definition, age 65 is an arbitrary boundary. Though arbitrary, it is now the standard used in measuring population aging in many countries.

Not only does it disclose a recent upswing in the momentum of population aging, the 1986 Census of Canada will also open a new chapter in the study of the various aspects of human aging processes in this country. In this new chapter, Canadians will focus more intently upon the surging growth in the oldest portion of the senior population. Also of rising importance will be analyses of the aging process viewed from the perspective of the Baby Boom Generation (those born between 1946 and 1966), whose oldest members will soon be nearing the so-called "pre-retirement years".

The 1986 Census of Canada has confirmed the forecast of an unusually rapid growth in the oldest portion of the senior population in recent years, a development whose national importance many are just now beginning to appreciate. This development may seem like a surprise when it is viewed from the perspective of what was being written about age-related changes in the Canadian population in the 1970s. Those writings reflect the fact that, in most countries, little was known about the population aged 80 and over due to the then common practice of treating all those above the age of 65 as one group for the purposes of analysis, and particularly of data presentation.

Most of the books and media coverage about population in the late 1970s and the early 1980s placed a spotlight on the future acceleration of population aging, particularly that which will take place early in the next century, when the members of the Baby Boom Generation begin to enter the ranks of the mostly retired population. The impression was formed, among many analysts, that major societal consequences of population aging would become pressing sources of public concern only some years after the end of this century.

This scenario began to unravel after the 1980 Census of the United States of America. The U.S. Census results triggered serious criticism and reconsideration of the existing population projections in that country. What had happened? Analysts of the 1980 U.S. Census data discovered that the older population was growing more rapidly than had been expected, and that the group aged 75 and over was increasing at a rate that was surprisingly high.

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Mortality statistics that became available only in the early 1980s demonstrated that a dramatic improvement of short-term survival rates had recently taken place within the older population.

Analysis of population trends in the light of these data will show that this decline in mortality rate at the oldest ages was a significant contributor, though not necessarily the most important one, to the surging growth of the oldest portion of the older population.

Using the newly received mortality statistics and data from the 1980 American and 1981 Canadian Censuses, demographers revised the official population projections in both countries and helped to draw attention to a "new" and significant element in the demographic evolution of North America - a booming growth of the number of persons of advanced age that had begun and seems likely to continue for most of the next two decades.

About the same time that the new population projections were being publicized, papers written by prominent gerontologists began to spread the understanding that unusual pressures on public resources arising from the declining functional independence at the personal level tend to occur in a population cohort after its average age passes 80, and not after 65 as had been commonly assumed during most of the 1970s. The convergence of that information with the revised population projections led to a new understanding of Canada's changing demographic profile, the timing of these changes and their consequences.

The 1986 Census of Canada will help to further focus attention upon the current and near term consequences of the fast growth in the number of Canadians of advanced age. To grasp some of these consequences, one may consider the subject of social supports. In the context of this report, "social support" means help received for necessary tasks or activities of daily life and for the maintenance of good emotional and mental health. Issues of the availability, character and effectiveness of such help become crucial in a population cohort when its average age passes 80, and a rapidly rising percentage of its members begin to experience a growing need for human supports, as is shown in the analyses of data from the 1985 Canadian General Social Survey.

It is fair to say that a national debate has now developed about the prospects of de-institutionalization through the strengthening of community supports for persons and families. The Honorable David Peterson, Premier of Ontario, during his September 1987 election victory speech, identified the independence of seniors as one of his government's top four priorities. In August 1987, the Government of Canada named the Honorable George Hees as the first Minister of State for Seniors to assist the Minister of Health and Welfare in respect of senior citizens. Furthermore, the National Advisory Council on Aging and other groups have already urged Canadians to consider as vitally important the matter of strengthening community resources so as to improve the quality of life of those who need enhanced levels of human supports, especially those considered to be among the frail elderly.

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In February of 1988, the Honorable Jake Epp, Minister of Health and Welfare, announced a new initiative to support independence for seniors. The major component of this new program is the provision of funding "...for projects aimed at improving the quality of life and independence of Canadian seniors". Community-based programs that significantly involve seniors and promote their independence will be financially assisted.

In keeping with these recent developments, the focus of this report is to provide public information about the cohorts with advanced age. In this text, the term "cohort" means a collection of persons who were born during a specific period of time such as five years; for example, those born between 1900 and 1904, whose survivors by 1986 were 82 to 86 years of age. Particular emphasis will be placed on aspects of the growing size of such cohorts that are pertinent to the national debate over de-institutionalization.

The discussion will be set within the context of a review of the quickening pace of the aging of Canada's population, comparing the aging process in this country with those in a number of other countries, both economically developed as well as less-developed. Canadian regional differences in age structures are also explored. The discussion then turns to the portrayal of rates of growth and gender gaps among the oldest old. The report continues with a study of recent changes in marital status, particularly changing widowhood rates among the older population. It concludes with a brief review of differences in living arrangement patterns between the sexes and among the various age groups of the older population.

**THE ACCELERATION OF POPULATION AGING FROM 1976 TO 1986**



## THE ACCELERATION OF POPULATION AGING FROM 1976 TO 1986

The speed of population aging quickened in the decade that ended with the 1986 Census, when just below 10.7% of Canadians (2.7 million) were aged 65 and over. This figure represents a significant increase of nearly two percentage points over the value for 1976. In sharp contrast, it took 30 years (1946 to 1976) for the percentage of Canadians aged 65 or over to increase from less than 7.2% to slightly above 8.7%. In 1901 just 5% were aged 65 and over.

The following table shows clearly how population aging has accelerated in Canada since the mid-1970s:

Period	Addition to the percentage of Canadians aged 65 and over
1961-1966	0.1
1966-1971	0.4
1971-1976	0.6
1976-1981	1.0
1981-1986	1.0

The figures shown above are percentage-point increases. For example, the percentage of Canadians aged 65 and over in 1961 was 7.6%. By adding 0.1 to that figure, the value for 1966 (7.7%) is obtained.

**Table 1. Total Population, Percentage Aged 65 and Over and Average Annual Growth Rates, Canada, 1946 to 1986**

Year	Total population		Population aged 65 and over		
	Number	Average annual growth rate	Number	Percentage of total population	Average annual growth rate
	'000	%	'000		%
1946 <sup>1</sup>	12,292.0	...	879.3	7.15	...
1956	16,080.8	3.08	1,243.9	7.74	4.15
1966	20,014.9	2.45	1,539.5	7.69	2.38
1976	22,992.6	1.49	2,002.3	8.71	3.01
1986	25,309.3	1.01	2,697.6	10.66	3.47

... figures not appropriate or not applicable.

<sup>1</sup> Excludes Newfoundland.

**Source:**

The Canada Year Book, 1948-49.

1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-715.

1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-823.

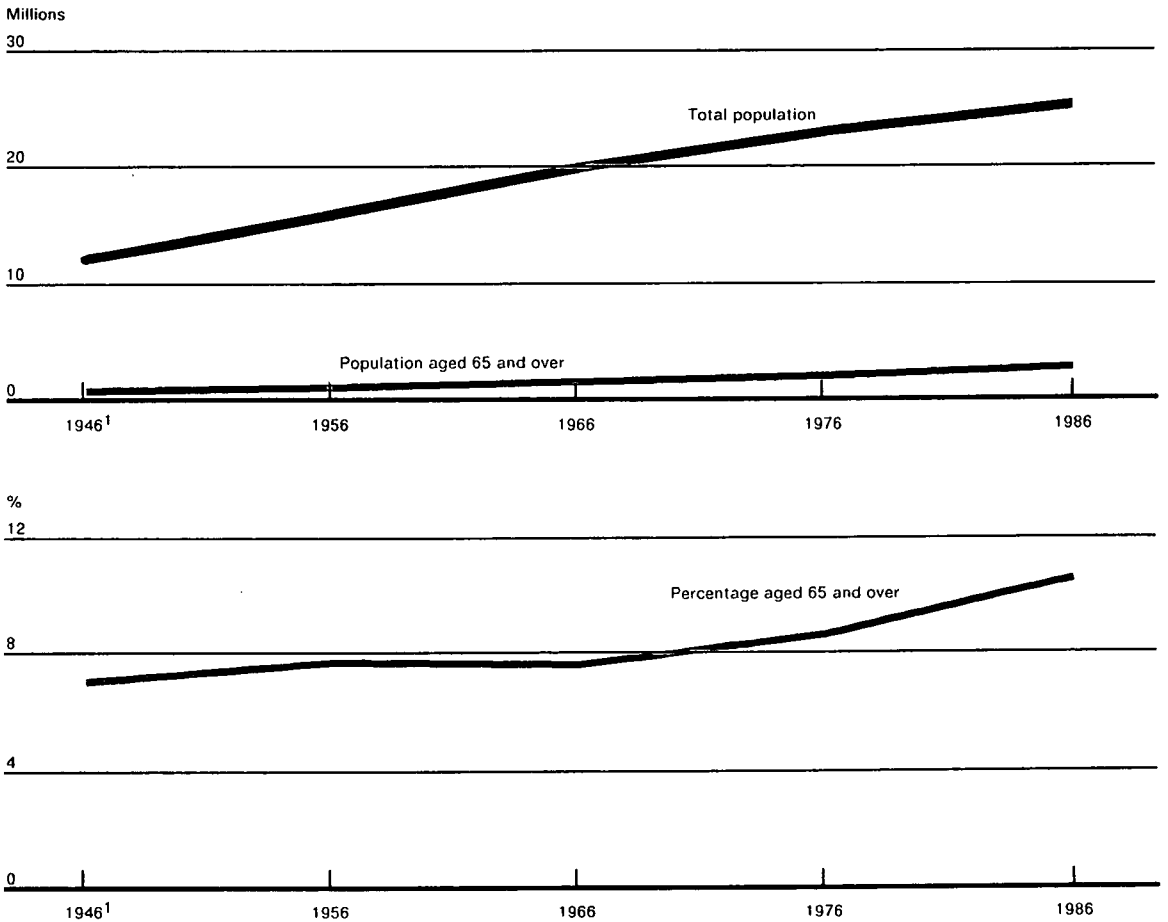
1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

Thus the decade that ended with the 1986 Census may be of historic significance in that it was the first 10-year period during which Canadian population aging moved forward by one percentage point in each of two consecutive five-year periods.

A combination of demographic conditions forms the immediate cause of this development. First, despite a recent increase in the birth rate for women in their late twenties or thirties, the overall birth rate has remained very low. Second, much higher birth

rates in a rapidly growing population of reproductive age several decades ago have helped to deliver greater and greater numbers of persons to the 65-year of age threshold. International immigration was one factor behind a rapidly growing total population in the childbearing ages in those decades. Added to these factors are recent marked declines in mortality rates within the older population. These demographic conditions are in turn driven by forces involving the economy, cultural values, health science, illness-management breakthroughs, etc.

**Chart 1. Total Population, Population Aged 65 and Over and Percentage Aged 65 and Over, Canada, 1946 to 1986**



<sup>1</sup> Excludes Newfoundland.

**Source:**  
 The Canada Year Book, 1948-49.  
 1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-715.  
 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-823.  
 1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

## AMONG THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, CANADA STILL HAS A RELATIVELY YOUNG POPULATION

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**D**espite its high speed of population aging in the last decade, Canada remains well below the world leaders in the degree of "maturity" in its age structure. (By "age structure maturity" we mean the relative number, or proportion, of seniors in the population at a point in time.) These leaders, e.g., Sweden, the United Kingdom, West Germany and France (see Chart 2) have long ago passed the level of age structure maturity now shown by Canada. For example, 30 years ago all of the just-named countries had approximately 11% of their populations aged 65 or over. By 1985, Sweden had already reached a level of age structure maturity not expected for Canada before the latter half of the second decade of the next century. The United Kingdom had, by 1985, already reached a level not projected for Canada before the first decade of the next century.

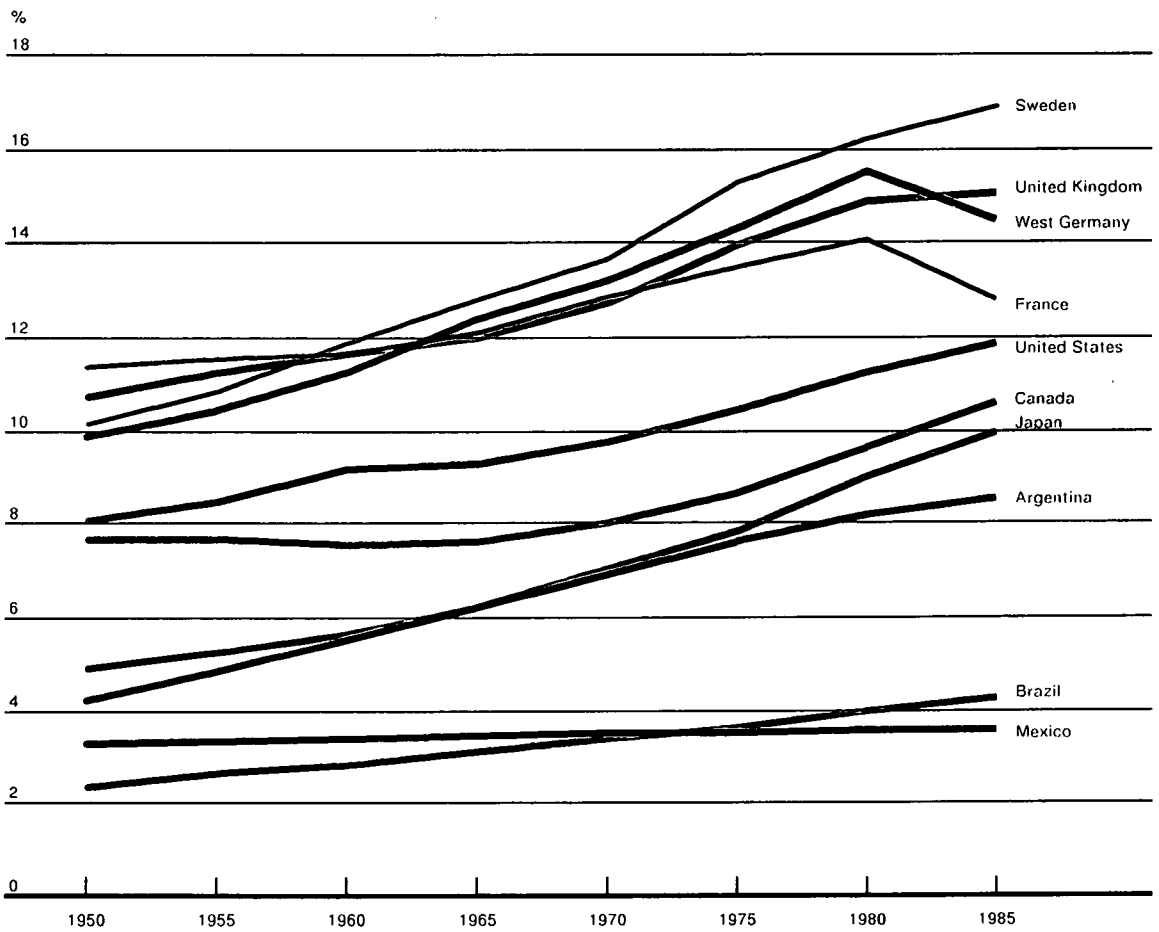
However, Canada has begun to catch up with the world leaders with regard to the degree of maturity of its population age structure. For example, since 1970 the gap in the percentage of population aged 65 and over between Canada and the United States has begun to close. It should be noted that prior to the Baby Boom period, that gap had been quite narrow.

Furthermore, there are indications that Canada is starting to catch up even more rapidly to the above-mentioned European countries in this regard. As Chart

2 shows, in the most recent five-year period, the share of Canada's population aged 65 and over increased almost a full percentage point, from 9.7% to nearly 10.7%, whereas in the United Kingdom the rate increase was marginal and Sweden recorded a less than 0.7 percentage point increase in its share. Moreover, France and West Germany recorded decreases in their percentages of the population aged 65 and over from 1980 to 1985. These declines can be attributed to low birth rates in those countries during the period of World War I, as well as the high level of casualties of particularly men of military service age during World War II.

That Canada remains one of the world's countries with a mature age structure can be seen when comparing its percentage of population aged 65 and over with those for Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Japan (see Chart 3). Generally, the more developed countries have a distinctly higher degree of age structure maturity than the rest of the world. In fact, since 1970, Japan has recorded a faster pace of population aging than Canada. The proportion of Japan's population aged 65 and over increased by nearly three percentage points, from 7.1% to more than 10%, during the most recent 15-year period, whereas Canada's rate increased by just 2.5 percentage points, from 8.1% to less than 10.7%.

**Chart 2. Percentage of Population Aged 65 and Over, Canada and Selected Countries, 1950 to 1986<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Data for Canada are for 1951, 1956, ..., 1986.

**Source:**

1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-715.

1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-901.

1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

Annuaire statistique de la France, 1983.

United Kingdom: Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1987 Edition.

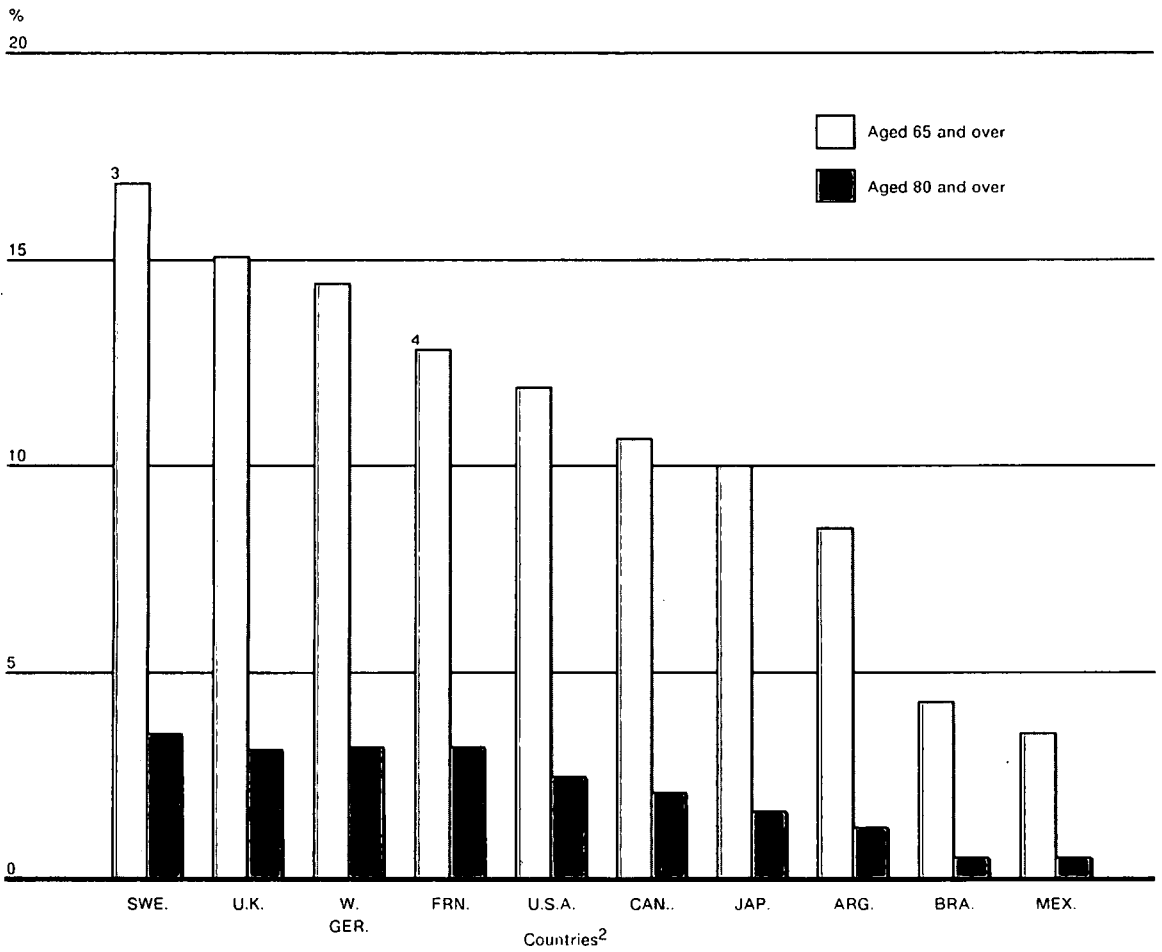
United Nations: 1970, 1972, 1976, 1981 and 1985 Demographic Yearbooks; Historical Supplement, Special Issue; and Global Estimates and Projections, Population by Sex and Age, the 1984 Assessment.

Preliminary Estimates of the Population of the United States, by Age, Sex and Race: 1970 and 1981.

Estimates of the Population of the United States by Age, Sex and Race: 1980 to 1985.



**Chart 3. Percentage of Population Aged 65 and Over and 80 and Over, Canada and Selected Countries, 1985-1986<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Figures for Canada are for 1986. For all other countries, the figures are for 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Countries listed in sequence as follows: Sweden, United Kingdom, West Germany, France, United States, Canada, Japan, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico.

<sup>3</sup> Canada will be here between 2010 and 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Canada will be here about year 2000.

**Source:**

1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

United Kingdom: Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1987 Edition.

United Nations: Global Estimates and Projections, Population by Sex and Age, the 1984 Assessment.

Estimates of the Population of the United States by Sex, Age and Race: 1980 to 1985.

## RAPID GROWTH OF THE SENIOR PORTION IN AN ERA OF NEARLY STAGNANT OVERALL NATIONAL POPULATION GROWTH

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**T**he 1986 Census showed that there were 2.7 million Canadians who were at least 65 years old. Two decades of high growth rates, i.e. rates in excess of 3% per year, in the mostly retired population had produced this figure. During the same time period, the entire population of Canada managed to grow at less than half the speed of the older population, thus producing the population aging surge reported above. In fact, in the 1976-1986 decade, the mostly retired population grew more than three times as fast as the rest of the nation (see Table 1).

Even the absolute numbers suggest accelerated growth of the older population in Canada. In 1966, there were 1.5 million Canadians aged 65 or over. Ten years later this figure had increased by one-half million to two million. Then in the last decade (ending with the 1986 Census) nearly seven-tenths of a million were added (see Table 1).

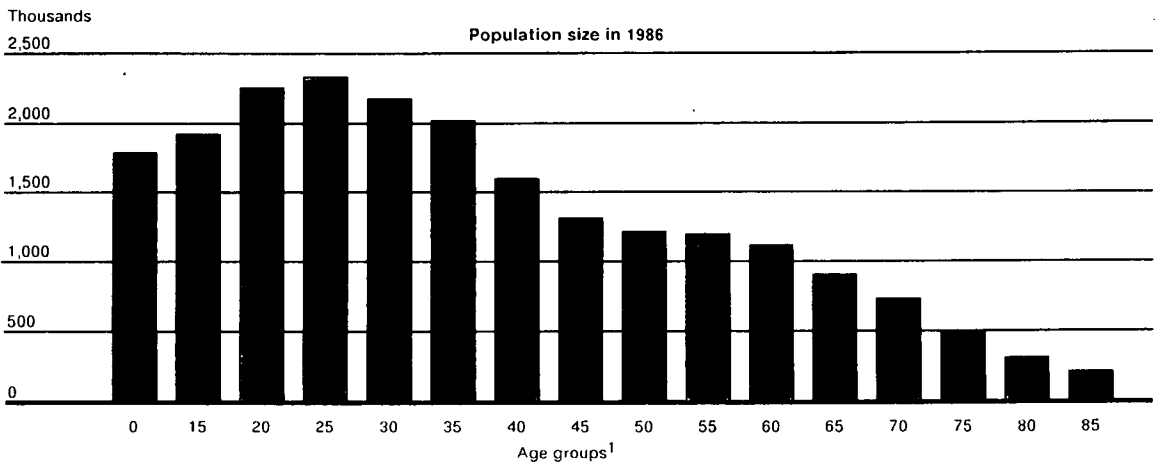
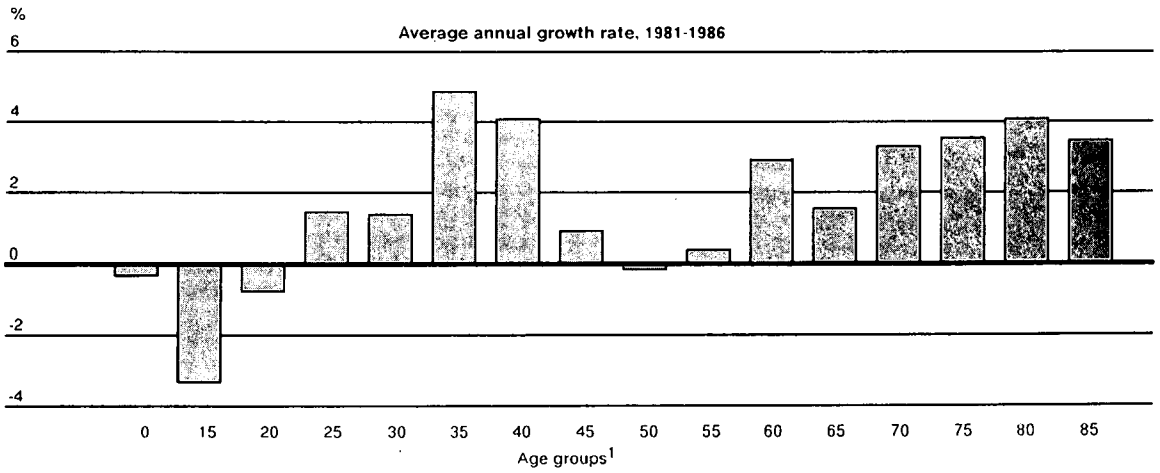
Despite these high growth rates among the older population, the fastest recent (1981-1986) growth rate shown by any five-year age group was in a group through which members of the Baby Boom

Generation were passing. An impressive 4.9% average annual growth rate took place in the age category 35-39 between 1981 and 1986. This was closely followed by a 4.1% average annual growth rate for the age category 40-44 between 1981 and 1986. Survivors of the age group 40-44 in 1986 will break into the current prime ages for retirement in the first decade of the next century.

In short, age groups into which members of the Baby Boom Generation have recently entered and those of the senior population have shown far higher than average growth rates in recent years than the rest of the population. Their rates have been above 3% per year, while the whole nation was growing at less than 1% per year in the 1981-1986 period. During that period, the population of teenagers was in a headlong decline in absolute numbers, while that of children under 10 was barely increasing.

In the future, unless their numbers are decimated by an unforeseen disaster, the survivors of births in the baby boom years will continue to create very high growth rates in the age groups that they enter.

**Chart 4. Average Annual Growth Rates, 1981-1986 and Population Size in 1986 by Age Groups, Canada**



<sup>1</sup> Number "0" refers to age group 0-14. Numbers "15", "20", etc., refer to 5-year age groups 15-19, 20-24, etc. Number "85" refers to the 85 and over age group. Since the 0-14 age group covers three 5-year periods, the population shown above is one-third of the 5,392,000 "under 15 years of age" total.

**Source:**  
 1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-901.  
 1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

## PROVINCIAL DIFFERENCES IN AGE STRUCTURE AND POPULATION AGING

**S**ize of the older population, maturity of population age structure and growth rate of the senior population are three aspects of the vast diversity that one finds in Canada. Since the provinces and territories vary widely in total population, it is to be expected that, with regard to their numbers of seniors, similar variation would be seen. It is notable that, in 1986, Ontario had nearly one million residents aged 65 and over and Quebec had nearly two-thirds of a million such persons (see Chart 5).

Given their large weights in the total Canadian population, it is no surprise that the percentages of persons aged 65 and over in Ontario and Quebec were close to the national average. Ontario's value in 1986 was just above this average (10.9% versus 10.7% for all of Canada), while that of Quebec was below

it at just 10%. Other provinces or territories with percentages of older population below the national average in 1986 were Newfoundland (8.8%), Alberta (8.1%) and the Yukon and Northwest Territories (less than 4% each).

Prince Edward Island has long had the most, or second most, mature age structure among the provinces. In 1986 it stood at the top along with Saskatchewan. Each of these two provinces had 12.7% of their populations aged 65 and over in that year. Also showing very mature age structures were Manitoba (12.6%) and British Columbia (12.1%). If these high percentages belonged to countries, such countries would have some of the highest levels of national age structure maturity in the world.

**Table 2. Population and Average Annual Growth Rates for the Population Aged 65 and Over and 75 and Over, Canada and Provinces, 1976-1986**

Province	Population 65 and over			Population 75 and over		
	1976	1986	Average annual growth rate, 1976-1986	1976	1986	Average annual growth rate, 1976-1986
	'000		%	'000		%
Newfoundland	36.5	50.0	3.7	13.4	18.1	3.5
Prince Edward Island	13.2	16.1	2.2	5.8	6.9	1.9
Nova Scotia	80.8	103.8	2.9	31.6	40.6	2.8
New Brunswick	61.1	78.7	2.9	23.8	31.3	3.1
Quebec	481.4	650.6	3.5	162.3	243.1	5.0
Ontario	738.9	992.7	3.4	280.7	390.1	3.9
Manitoba	106.6	133.9	2.6	41.8	54.8	3.1
Saskatchewan	102.2	128.6	2.6	41.2	53.0	2.9
Alberta	137.9	191.3	3.9	52.4	74.8	4.3
British Columbia	242.0	349.5	4.4	94.2	134.0	4.2
Yukon	0.6	0.9	3.8	0.2	0.3	3.8
Northwest Territories	1.1	1.5	3.0	0.3	0.5	5.2
Canada	2,002.3	2,697.6	3.5	747.8	1,047.5	4.0

**Source:**

1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-823.

1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

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Just over 4% of Canadians (about one million persons) were aged 75 and over in 1986. Leading the provinces, in terms of the percentage of population aged 75 and over, was Prince Edward Island with 5.4%. Not far behind, with values above 5%, were Manitoba and Saskatchewan. British Columbia and Nova Scotia followed closely with 4.6% each (see Chart 5).

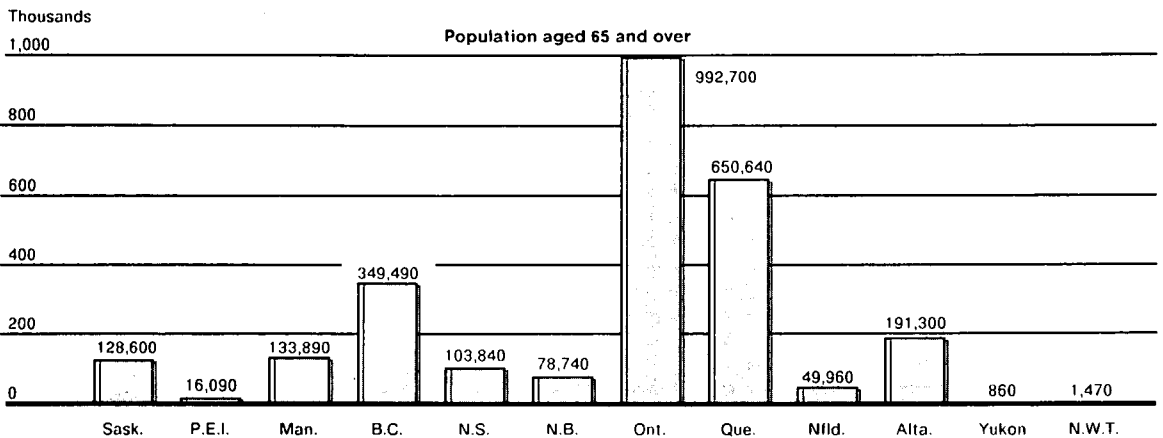
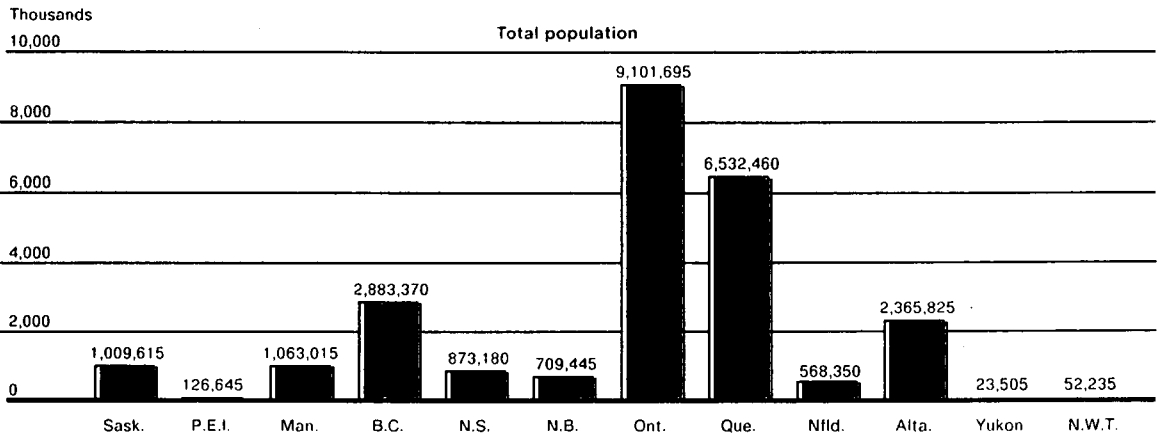
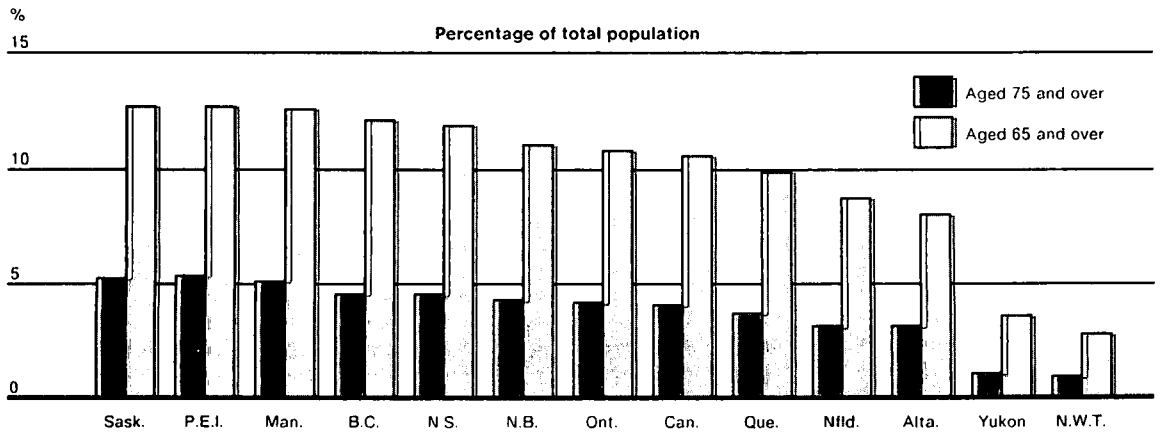
Quite a different pattern emerges when one considers the rate of growth of the senior population in the 1976-1986 decade (see Table 2). Among the provinces, British Columbia had the fastest growth rate for persons aged 65 and over (4.4% per year), and the third fastest growth rate for persons aged 75 and over (4.2%). This latter percentage is, however, below the 5% rate for Quebec and the 4.3% rate for Alberta. Well below the national average rate of growth of the population aged 75 and over were the values for Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, three provinces that

have had quite mature age structures for several decades.

The situation of British Columbia merits further analysis and comment. This province is unique among the provinces, in having both a very mature age structure and an unusually rapid growth rate in the numbers of persons aged both 65 and over and 75 and over. Should the 4% per annual growth rate of the 75 and over population persist in this province, the number of British Columbia residents in this age group will double before the year 2006.

Provincial adjustment to relatively large numbers of older population depends not only upon the absolute numbers and their proportion in the population, but also upon their rate of growth. Extremely rapid growth intensifies the adjustment pressures, while providing greater opportunities for the development of new forms of human services. British Columbia is in the forefront of the large Canadian regions facing this adjustment.

**Chart 5. Percentage of Population Aged 65 and Over and 75 and Over, Canada and Provinces, and Total Population and Population Aged 65 and Over by Province, 1986**



Source:  
1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

## VERY MATURE AGE STRUCTURES IN SOME URBAN REGIONS

**F**or British Columbia and several other provinces with rather mature age structures, the adjustment pressures associated with rapid growth in the number of older persons would be particularly notable in the urban centres known to provide better than average formal support services to seniors and their families. This is likely to be so in the Census Metropolitan Area of Victoria, British Columbia, where about 8% of the total population was aged 75 or over in 1986. This figure is twice the national average (see Table 3 and Chart 6).

Even on the international scale, Victoria, with 18% of its 1986 population aged 65 and over, would be classed as one of the cities with the greatest concentration of seniors, or with the most mature age structures. Its situation represents a level of age structure maturity not expected for Canada before the latter half of the second decade of the next century.

Thus the patterns of social and health service requirements, opportunity and delivery in Victoria merit careful study. Of special importance for such study is the task of gaining an understanding of the composition and relative size (compared to the city's total labour force) of the core of human service skills that seems optimal for such a mature population. That composition and intensity of skill development in human services could be something totally new for Canada.

Unfortunately, Victoria may provide a weak case for learning about the economic adaptation of a whole country, like Canada, to a very mature age structure. The reason for this is the fact that Victoria's economy is linked with the rest of Canada, or even British Columbia, in ways that are quite unlike those in which the economy of a developed country, like Canada, is linked to the rest of the world. Moreover, over the next 35 years, new technologies, particularly new ways of tapping into the rich resources of our senior population, will likely be developed. The patterns of consumption and wealth distribution now known could be quite different from those that will emerge in the decades ahead.

Victoria is just one of a number of Canadian urban settlements that had extremely high, by current world standards, levels of age structure maturity in 1986 (see Chart 3). Considering Canada as a whole, the small urban centres (those with less than 10,000 population) are notable in this regard. In 1986, 14% of these centres' populations were aged 65 and over, while nearly 6% were aged 75 and over. In other words, concentrations of persons who had lived past the life expectancy were 50% higher in small towns than in Canada as a whole (see Chart 6).

Particular note should be taken of small towns in the Prairie provinces, especially Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The small towns in these provinces showed concentrations of senior population that were at least 50% above the average for Canada (see Chart 6). Alberta had a divergent pattern, compared to the other two Prairie provinces, in that its towns of 5,000 to 10,000 in population had an average proportion of senior population that was just below the national average for the 65-and-over age range, while being at the national average for the age group of 75 and over.

The small towns of Ontario are always worthy of note. Over one million Canadians resided in Ontario towns of less than 30,000 in size in 1986. As a group, these towns showed a far higher concentration of population aged 75 and over than did Canada as a whole (6% versus 4% for Canada, as Table 3 indicates).

Among the larger urban centres, the very largest (500,000 or more in population) had concentrations of senior population below the national average. This situation was true both for the percentage aged 65 and over (10.2% versus 10.7% for all of Canada) and for that aged 75 and over (4.0% versus 4.1%). The remaining sets of urban size groups, from 10,000-29,999 to 100,000-499,999, had proportions of senior population distinctly above the national average. Since the populations of these areas comprise a high percentage of that of the whole country, their overall level of concentration of senior population would have to be near the national average.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, one sees the rural farm areas and the two territories with far from mature age structures, at least by comparison with developed countries or with Canada as a whole. Only 6% of the not negligible 890,000 rural farm population was aged 65 or over in 1986. Less than 4% of either the Yukon or Northwest Territories were aged 65 and over in 1986.

Thus, in summary, the vast diversity of Canada comes out very clearly when one compares regional

(small regions') age structures from coast to coast. The national average masks the high level of variation. This diversity obviously makes it difficult to determine the optimal allocation of social and health service resources over such a regional landscape. Furthermore, the task is compounded in those small regions that are subject to strong seasonal fluctuation of population, a phenomenon reportedly apparent in the Prairie provinces.

**Table 3. Percentage of Population Aged 65 and Over and 75 and Over by Urban and Rural Areas, Canada and Provinces, 1986**

Area	Canada		Newfoundland		Prince Edward Island	
	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over
	%					
Urban:						
500,000 and over	10.2	4.0	-	-	-	-
100,000 - 499,999	11.2	4.5	9.6	3.7	-	-
30,000 - 99,999	11.9	4.7	-	-	-	-
10,000 - 29,999	11.4	4.7	7.9	2.9	15.3	7.2
5,000 - 9,999	12.2	5.2	7.6	2.4	-	-
2,500 - 4,999	13.8	6.0	9.7	3.7	-	-
1,000 - 2,499	14.7	6.5	8.6	3.0	15.9	7.7
Less than 10,000 <sup>1</sup>	13.6	5.9	8.8	3.1	16.0	7.7
Total urban <sup>1</sup>	11.0	4.4	8.8	3.3	15.4	7.3
Rural:						
Farm	6.2	1.6	6.2	2.1	8.8	3.0
Non-farm	10.2	3.6	8.7	3.1	11.4	4.5
Total rural	9.6	3.3	8.7	3.1	11.0	4.3
Grand total	10.7	4.1	8.8	3.2	12.7	5.4

Area	Nova Scotia		New Brunswick		Quebec	
	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over
	%					
Urban:						
500,000 and over	-	-	-	-	10.2	3.8
100,000 - 499,999	9.4	3.7	-	-	10.0	3.7
30,000 - 99,999	15.1	5.7	12.2	4.9	10.9	4.1
10,000 - 29,999	14.1	5.5	12.3	5.0	9.5	3.5
5,000 - 9,999	14.9	6.3	10.9	4.6	10.8	4.4
2,500 - 4,999	17.2	8.1	18.0	8.5	12.6	5.3
1,000 - 2,499	16.8	7.6	14.6	6.4	13.2	5.6
Less than 10,000 <sup>1</sup>	16.0	7.1	3.7	6.1	12.4	5.2
Total urban <sup>1</sup>	12.2	4.9	12.6	5.2	10.4	4.0
Rural:						
Farm	8.8	2.8	8.1	2.4	4.5	1.4
Non-farm	11.7	4.4	9.7	3.6	8.8	3.0
Total rural	11.5	4.3	9.6	3.6	8.4	2.9
Grand total	11.9	4.6	11.1	4.4	10.0	3.7

See note, footnote and source at end of table.



**Table 3. Percentage of Population Aged 65 and Over and 75 and Over by Urban and Rural Areas, Canada and Provinces, 1986 - Concluded**

Area	Ontario		Manitoba		Saskatchewan	
	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over
%						
Urban:						
500,000 and over	10.2	4.0	12.4	5.0	-	-
100,000 - 499,999	11.1	4.4	-	-	9.8	4.1
30,000 - 99,999	11.7	4.6	14.1	6.2	14.0	6.1
10,000 - 29,999	13.0	5.7	10.1	4.4	15.7	6.9
5,000 - 9,999	13.6	6.0	16.1	7.4	19.8	9.2
2,500 - 4,999	14.9	6.5	25.7	13.1	18.5	8.8
1,000 - 2,499	16.6	7.6	16.9	8.3	21.5	10.1
Less than 10,000 <sup>1</sup>	14.8	6.6	18.6	9.0	20.4	9.6
Total urban <sup>1</sup>	11.1	4.5	13.1	5.6	13.1	5.7
Rural:						
Farm	7.2	1.9	6.2	1.4	6.4	1.4
Non-farm	10.4	3.7	13.2	5.2	16.4	6.7
Total rural	10.0	3.4	11.2	4.1	12.2	4.5
Grand total	10.9	4.3	12.6	5.2	12.7	5.3

Area	Alberta		British Columbia		Yukon		Northwest Territories	
	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over	65 and over	75 and over
%								
Urban:								
500,000 and over	7.3	2.8	12.0	4.8	-	-	-	-
100,000 - 499,999	-	-	18.2	8.0	-	-	-	-
30,000 - 99,999	9.2	3.7	13.5	5.3	-	-	-	-
10,000 - 29,999	7.7	3.5	11.8	4.5	3.2	0.9	1.4	0.4
5,000 - 9,999	9.4	4.2	12.0	4.7	-	-	-	-
2,500 - 4,999	11.7	5.4	13.1	5.0	-	-	2.0	0.7
1,000 - 2,499	13.5	6.1	10.7	4.2	-	-	2.9	1.0
Less than 10,000 <sup>1</sup>	11.1	5.1	12.1	4.7	-	-	2.3	0.8
Total urban <sup>1</sup>	8.1	3.3	12.8	5.2	3.2	0.9	1.9	0.6
Rural:								
Farm	5.7	1.3	6.6	1.5	-	-	-	-
Non-farm	9.6	3.6	9.7	2.9	4.6	1.4	3.6	1.4
Total rural	8.1	2.8	9.5	2.7	4.6	1.4	3.6	1.3
Grand total	8.1	3.2	12.1	4.7	3.7	1.1	2.8	1.0

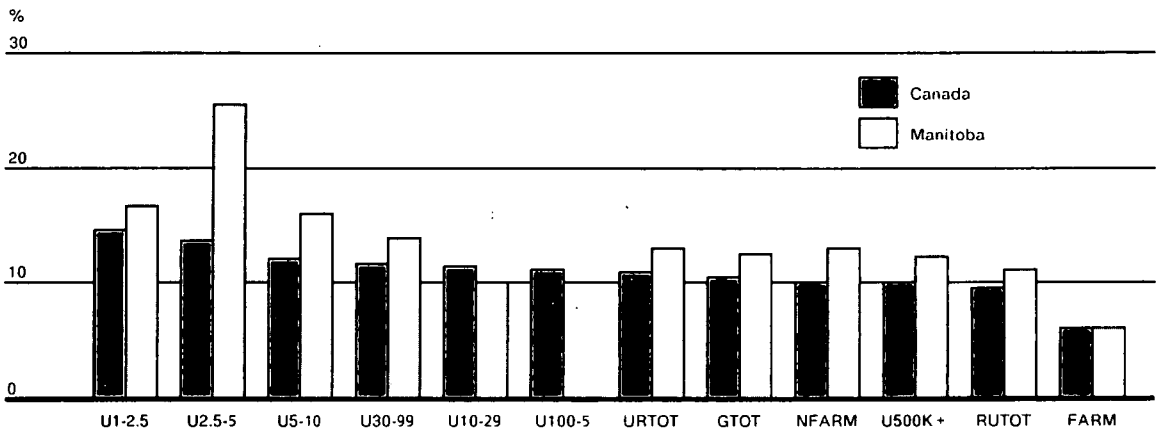
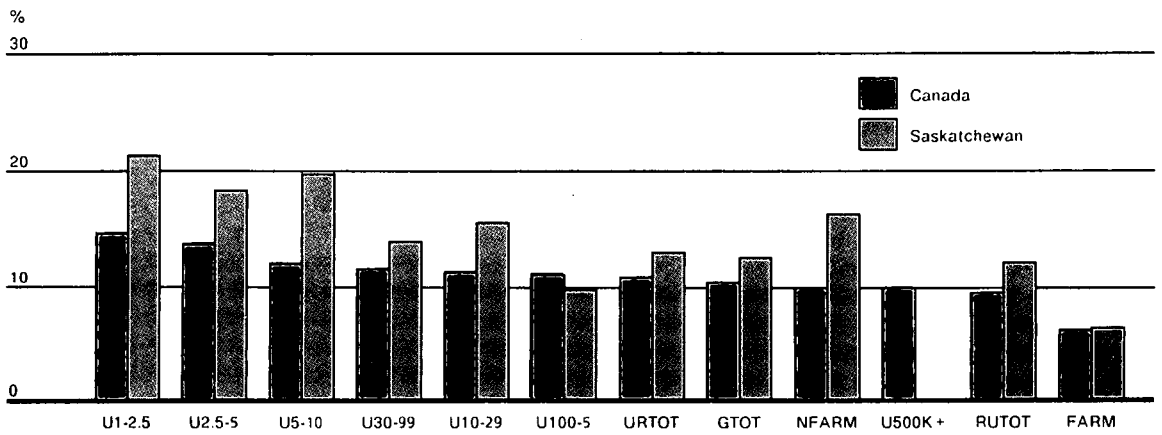
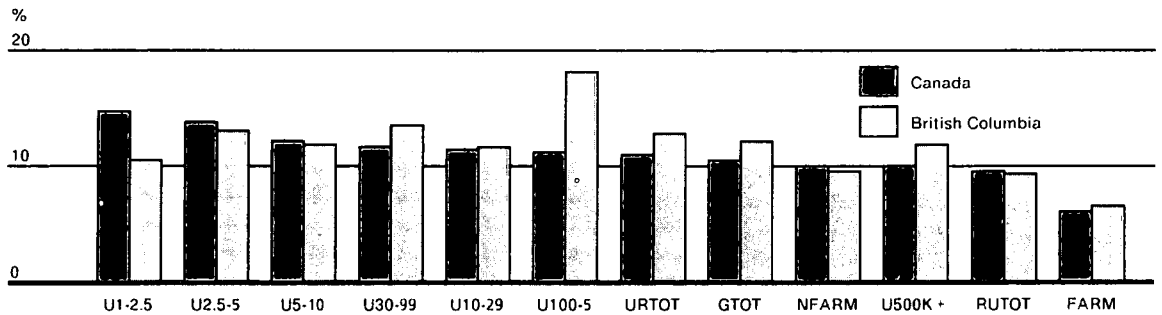
- Nil or zero.

<sup>1</sup> Includes a small number of urban areas with a population fewer than 1,000.

Source:

1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

**Chart 6. Percentage of Population Aged 65 and Over by Urban and Rural Area Types, <sup>1</sup> Canada and Selected Provinces, 1986**



<sup>1</sup> Urban areas are broken down into the following population size groups: greater than 500,000 (U500K+), 100,000-499,999 (U100-5), 30,000-99,999 (U30-99), 10,000-29,999 (U10-29), 5,000-9,999 (U5-10), 2,500-4,999 (U2.5-5) and 1,000-2,499 (U1-2.5). Rural areas are broken down into farm and non-farm areas. Totals are identified as URTOT for all urban areas, RUTOT for all rural areas and GTOT for all urban and rural areas combined. The urban total and grand total include data for a small number of urban areas with fewer than 1,000 population.

**Source:**  
1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

## PERSISTENT GENDER GAP IN POPULATION SIZE AT THE OLDEST AGES

It is now widely known that women outnumber men in the older population. This predominance increased gradually from 1971 to 1986 (see Chart 7). The numeric superiority of women in the total population had appeared for the first time during the 1970s.

An examination of sex ratios for various age groups, for the census years from 1971 to 1986, shows that a decline in the ratio of men to women really sets in at the age of 45. Moving from 45 to increasingly higher ages, one finds that the rate of decline in the sex ratios generally accelerated with rising age. By age 85, the difference between the number of men and women was quite substantial.

Women outnumbered men by more than two to one in the 85-and-over age group for the first time in 1981. The imbalance between the sexes at this age deepened between 1981 and 1986, when there were only 44 men per 100 women aged 85 and over. Clearly, issues associated with the quality of life of Canada's oldest citizens are issues of importance to particularly, though not exclusively, women.

Across most of the older age groups the rate of fall in the ratio of men to women seems to have slowed between 1981 and 1986. Indeed, in the 80-84 age group, the ratio of men to women may have risen slightly from 1981 to 1986 (from 586 to 595 men per 1,000 women).

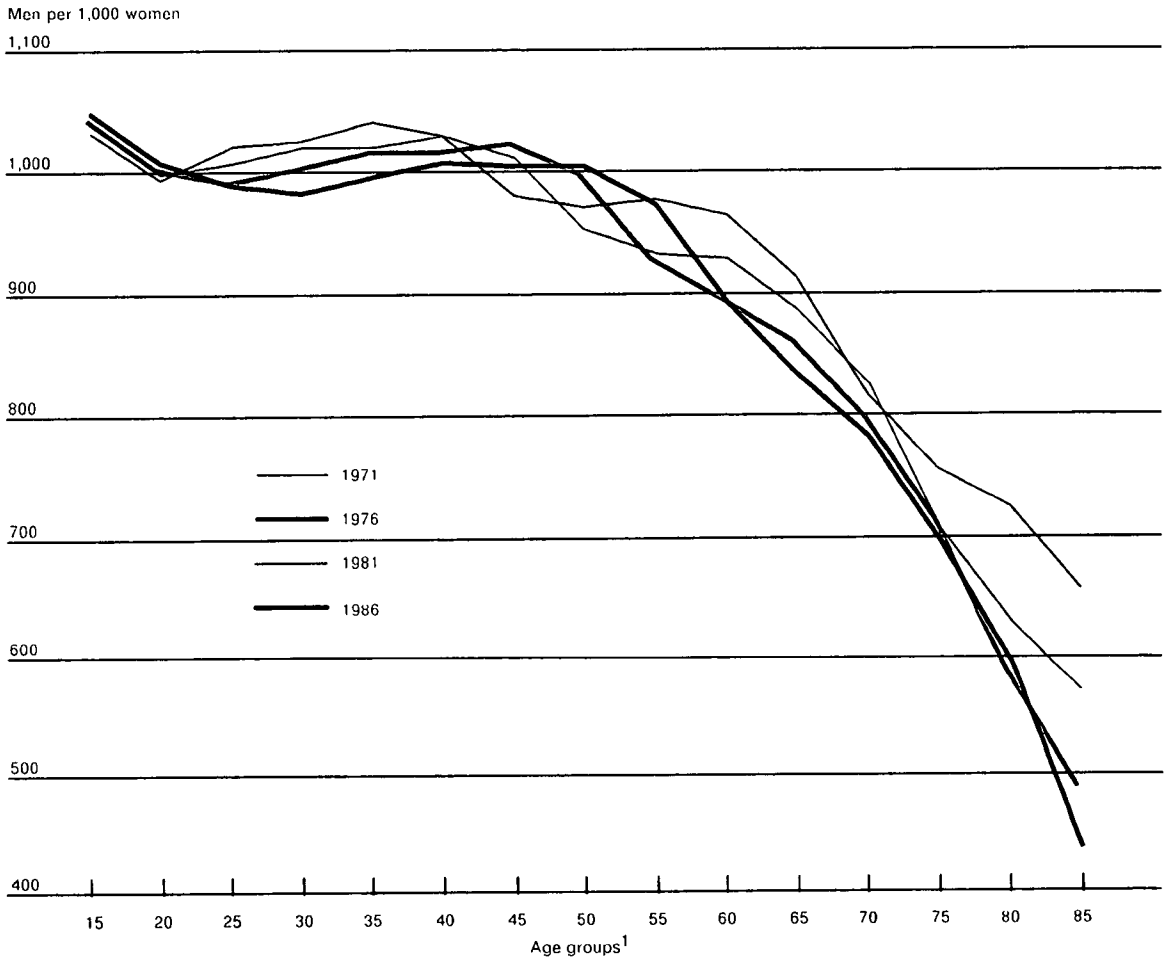
Chart 7 shows that the pronounced downward (or upward) trends in the sex ratio at a given age have been confined largely to the older ages since 1971. These patterns are reflections of the fact that

mortality declines at the older ages have been much stronger for women than for men in recent decades. Indeed, as is shown in this chart, the ratio of men to women for the age group 55-59 was very similar in 1971 and 1986 (979 men per 1,000 women in 1971 versus 974 in 1986). However, as one moves to higher and higher ages, the gap between the 1971 and 1986 ratios widens. For the age group 85 and over, the number of men per 1,000 women decreased from 657 in 1971 to 436 in 1986. The widening of the 1971 to 1986 gap in sex ratios was especially pronounced after age 75. Below that age the year-to-year fall was relatively gentle.

The predominance of women in the older population is even more pronounced in the United States than in Canada. The pattern of sharply declining ratios of men to women took hold in Canada only within the last 25 years, while it has been evident in the United States since before World War II. However, projections suggest that Canada appears to be catching up and the two countries are expected to be very close in sex ratios at the older ages by the turn of the century.

For both Canada and the United States, the statistical agency projections envisage a gently rising ratio of men to women in the older population during the early decades of the next century. This is partly due to the expected fall in the proportion of those aged 80 and over during those years, as the Baby Boomers invade the ranks of seniors. In addition, there is an assumption of gradual decline in the size of the male-female longevity gap in the years ahead.

**Chart 7. Number of Men Per 1,000 Women by Age Groups, Canada, 1971 to 1986**



<sup>1</sup> Numbers "15", "20", etc., refer to 5-year age groups 15-19, 20-24, etc. Number "85" refers to the 85 and over age group.

**Source:**

1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-715.  
 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-823.  
 1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-901.  
 1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

## DRAMATIC GROWTH IN THE RANKS OF THE OLDEST ELDERLY

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**A**lthough it constitutes only a small percentage of the total population, the group aged 80 and over merits careful attention. Canadians falling into the 80-and-over age range represented 2.1% of the total population at the time of the 1986 Census - 537,000 persons in a grand total of 25.3 million Canadians.

As was mentioned previously, during the decade that ended with the 1986 Census of Canada, the population aged 65 and over grew in size at an average annual rate of 3.5%, while the total population of Canada expanded at just over 1% per year. Women aged 80 and over, however, were increasing in numbers during this period at nearly 4.7% per year. This rate far exceeded that for similarly aged men, largely because men in the 85-and-over age group have so far failed to show significant acceleration in rate of growth. There is a suggestion of such an acceleration for men aged 75 to 84, from the 1971-1976 to the 1981-1986 periods (see Chart 8).

The Canadian projections anticipate a huge growth rate of 4% or more per annum for those aged 80 and over in the remaining years of this century, and continuing strong growth (above 3% per year) into the first decade of the next. The projections suggest that a particularly sharp growth will occur among those aged 85 and over, relative to those 65 and over, during the period from 1990 to 2010. In other words, a veritable population explosion among seniors of more advanced age is underway and will not end soon.

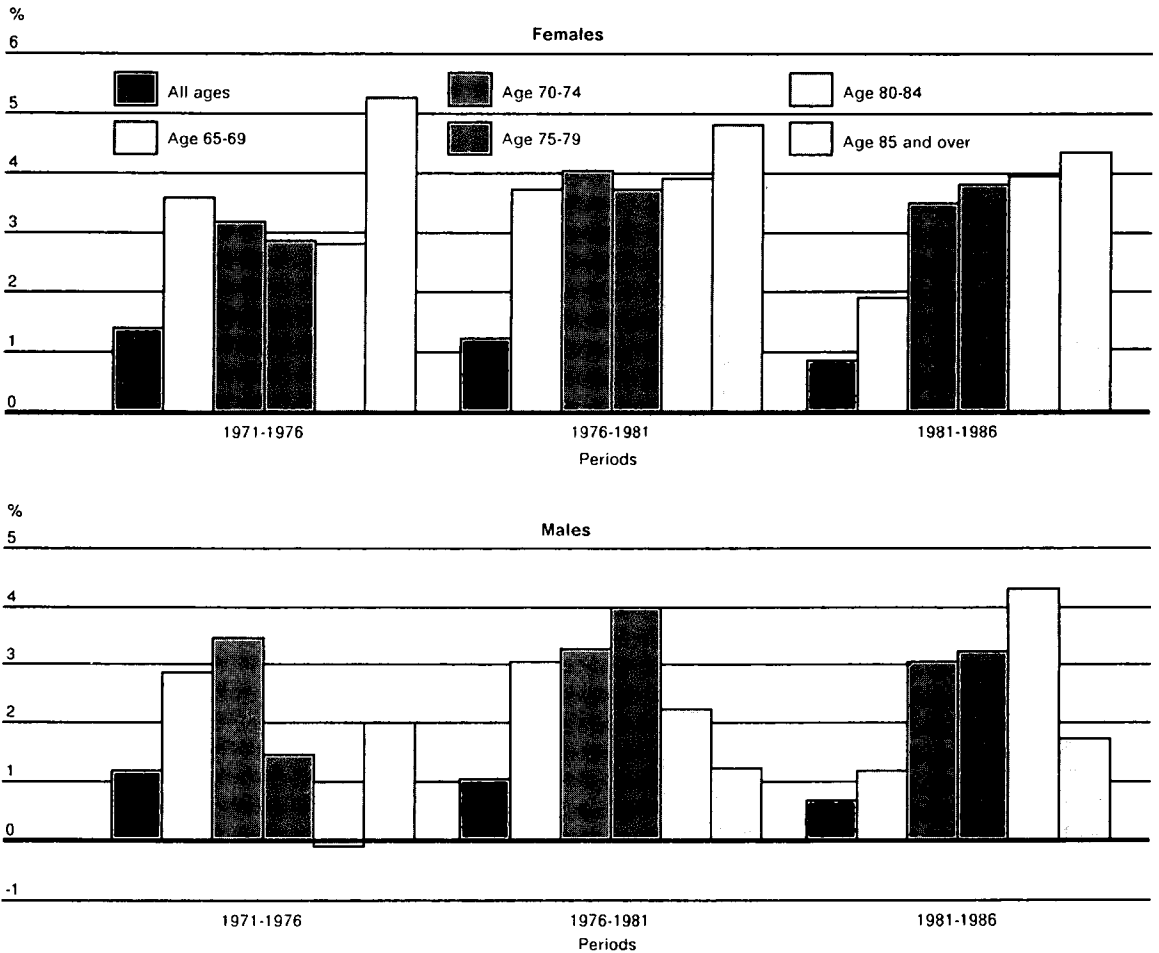
Among developed countries, Canada is probably a leader in terms of the growth rate of population aged 80 and over in the past decade (see Chart 9).

In the 1980s in particular, the population aged 80 or over seems to have increased at about 3.8% per year (on average) in Canada, while it was growing at roughly 3.1% in the United States, 3.7% in the United Kingdom, 3.5% in France and 2.8% in Sweden. It is notable that in nearly all of these countries the growth rate of the 80-and-over population accelerated between the late 1970s and the early 1980s. It must also be noted, however, that the growth rates for the other countries listed in this chart, namely Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Japan and West Germany, are much above those of the countries identified above (including Canada).

These numbers and pattern of growth are important because they pertain to a population category whose rates of utilization of human support services of various kinds, public and private, are far in excess of what one might expect by just looking at their numbers. Furthermore, some aspects of the services needed by a significant proportion of these oldest seniors entail the development of a special kind of social bonding within families as well as among families in a community. Just recently, the government of Ontario issued a White Paper which states: "The increase in the number of elderly citizens, and particularly the older elderly, is creating a new generation of issues which will have a profound effect upon provincial services".

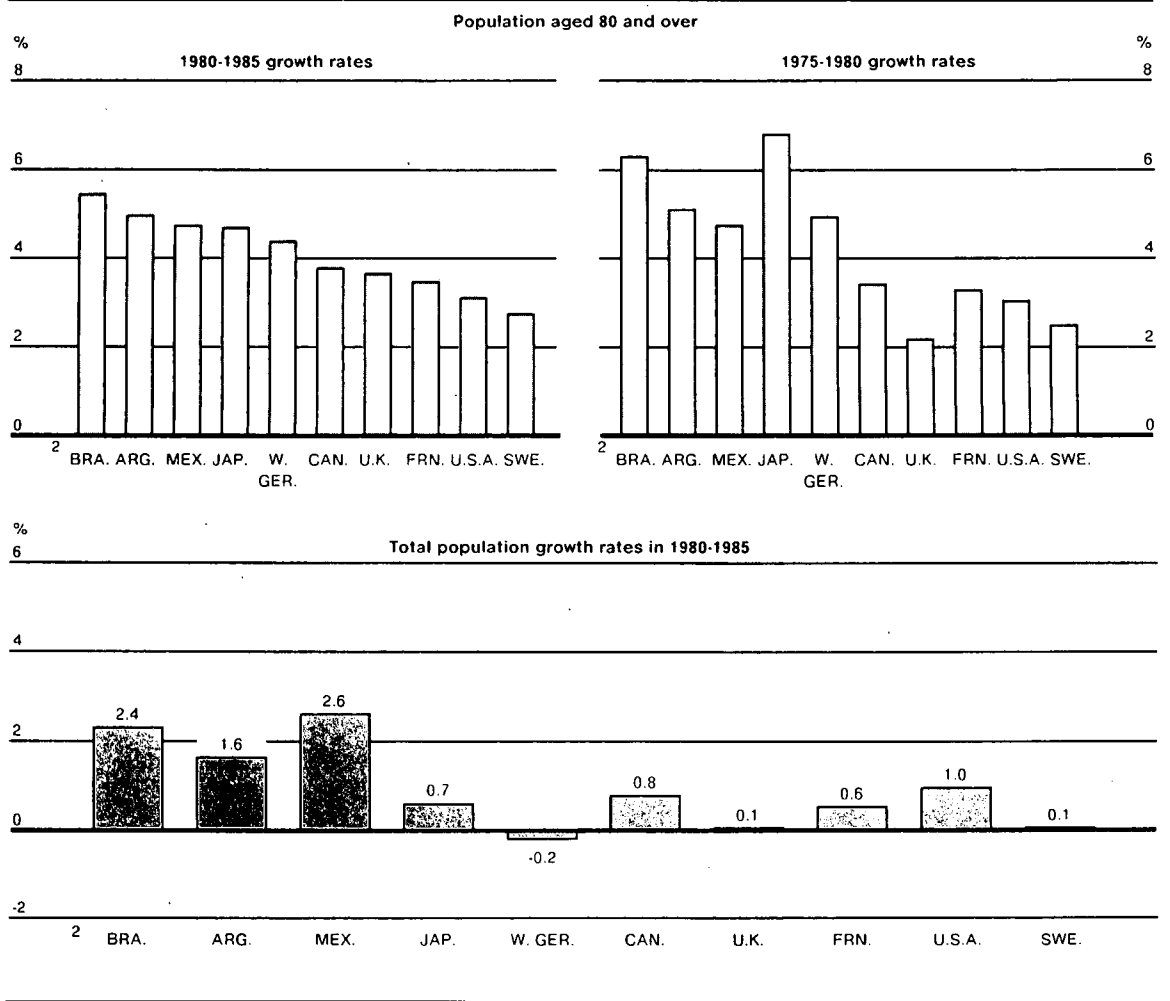
In short, the rapid growth of the population of advanced age in Canada will likely have consequences that will engage sustained national attention in the years ahead. One of the most crucial challenges facing Canada in the next generation will be that of containing or lowering the rates of loss of functional capacity within aging cohorts.

**Chart 8. Average Annual Growth Rates of Population by Sex and Selected Age Groups, Canada, 1971-1976 to 1981-1986**



**Source:**  
 1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-715.  
 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-823.  
 1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-901.  
 1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

**Chart 9. Average Annual Growth Rates of Population Aged 80 and Over, 1975-1980 and 1980-1985,<sup>1</sup> and Average Annual Growth Rates of Total Population, 1980-1985,<sup>1</sup> Canada and Selected Countries**



<sup>1</sup> Data for Canada are for 1976-1981 and 1981-1986.

<sup>2</sup> Countries listed in sequence as follows: Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Japan, West Germany, Canada, United Kingdom, France, United States and Sweden.

**Source:**

1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-901.

1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

Annuaire statistique de la France, 1983.

United Kingdom: Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1987 Edition.

United Nations: 1976, 1981 and 1985 Demographic Yearbooks; Historical Supplement, Special Issue; and Global Estimates and Projections, Population by Sex and Age, the 1984 Assessment.

Estimates of the Population of the United States by Age, Sex and Race: 1980 to 1985.

## RECENT DECLINE IN THE PROPORTION OF WIDOWED PERSONS AMONG SENIORS

The implications of the rapid growth of the population of advanced ages will depend upon the extent of concurrent shifts in certain aspects of demographic composition in this population group, while that growth is underway. One relevant aspect of the shifts in population composition involves changes in marital status. The pattern of change in marital status composition in recent years can be deduced by observing differences in growth rates of the various marital status groups. These differences are the immediate causes of marital status distribution changes.

The fastest growing marital status group in the older population in the past 10 years has been that of the divorced, followed by the group that was married (including a very small fraction counted as separated). As Table 4 shows, the growth rates for the divorced have been extremely high, partly as a

result of their very small numbers at the older ages. The average annual growth rate in the divorced population aged 65 and over has exceeded 10% in the 1976 to 1986 decade.

This high growth rate must not be taken as a measure of the rate at which seniors are breaking up their marriages. It reflects in part a recent rapid increase in the number of persons who arrived in the "senior category" as divorced persons. It must be noted, in particular, that the proportion of divorced persons remains very low. In 1986, only about 3% of men and women aged 65-69 were divorced, as is shown in Table 5.

The faster than average growth rate of those in the married category (see Table 4) probably reflects in part the tendency of declining mortality rates to keep older families intact for longer periods.

**Table 4. Population and Average Annual Growth Rates of the Older Population by Marital Status, Age Groups and Sex, Canada, 1976-1981 and 1981-1986**

Age group, sex and marital status	Population			Average annual growth rate	
	1976	1981	1986	1976-1981	1981-1986
Aged 65 - 69	'000			%	
Males:					
Married/separated	278.6	324.2	346.2	3.3	1.4
Single	30.6	31.2	29.2	0.4	-1.3
Widowed	24.0	26.2	26.9	1.8	0.6
Divorced	5.3	9.0	12.2	14.2	7.0
Total	338.5	390.6	414.5	3.1	1.2
Females:					
Married/separated	214.0	261.5	296.3	4.4	2.7
Single	37.3	38.6	34.9	0.7	-1.9
Widowed	124.9	143.0	149.7	2.9	1.0
Divorced	6.1	10.7	16.3	14.9	10.5
Total	382.3	453.8	497.2	3.7	1.9

See source at end of table.



Growing least rapidly, among the marital status, has been the group that has never married. There is a substantial gender difference here, in that the growth in the number of older men who have never married has been much below that for older, never-married women.

The proportions of never-married persons of either sex have fallen in recent years. In the 1976-1986 decade, the proportion who were never married among women aged 65 and over declined from 10.2% to 8.6%, while the corresponding figures for men were 9.6% and 7.5% (Table 5).

**Table 4. Population and Average Annual Growth Rates of the Older Population by Marital Status, Age Groups and Sex, Canada, 1976-1981 and 1981-1986 - Continued**

Age group, sex and marital status	Population			Average annual growth rate	
	1976	1981	1986	1976-1981	1981-1986
<b>Aged 70 - 74</b>	<b>'000</b>			<b>%</b>	
Males:					
Married/separated	186.5	221.9	259.4	3.8	3.4
Single	24.0	23.7	24.1	-0.2	0.3
Widowed	27.9	30.4	33.4	1.8	2.0
Divorced	2.9	5.2	7.5	15.0	9.0
Total	241.4	281.2	324.3	3.3	3.1
Females:					
Married/separated	126.6	157.0	193.7	4.8	4.7
Single	30.2	34.0	34.9	2.5	0.5
Widowed	132.4	155.3	175.8	3.5	2.6
Divorced	3.2	5.9	9.6	16.5	12.4
Total	292.4	352.2	414.0	4.1	3.5
<b>Aged 75 - 79</b>					
Males:					
Married/separated	105.4	130.0	155.7	4.7	4.0
Single	14.8	16.7	16.4	2.5	-0.4
Widowed	28.7	31.3	34.1	1.8	1.8
Divorced	1.5	2.5	3.8	13.8	9.8
Total	150.4	180.5	209.9	4.0	3.3
Females:					
Married/separated	63.7	78.6	99.2	4.7	5.3
Single	22.1	25.9	28.8	3.4	2.3
Widowed	125.0	145.1	167.8	3.2	3.1
Divorced	1.5	2.7	4.7	16.6	14.7
Total	212.3	252.2	300.5	3.8	3.8

See source at end of table.

Similarly, the proportion widowed, among those who had ever been married (the widowhood ratio) fell between 1976 and 1986. For women aged 65 and over, the decline was from 55.5% to 52.7%.

A sharper fall in relative terms (though smaller in absolute terms) occurred among men aged 65 and over. Their widowhood ratio dropped from 16.8% in 1976 to 14.6% in 1986.

**Table 4. Population and Average Annual Growth Rates of the Older Population by Marital Status, Age Groups and Sex, Canada, 1976-1981 and 1981-1986 - Concluded**

Age group, sex and marital status	Population			Average annual growth rate	
	1976	1981	1986	1976-1981	1981-1986
<b>Aged 80 and over</b>		<b>'000</b>			<b>%</b>
Males:					
Married/separated	77.2	87.9	107.5	2.8	4.5
Single	14.3	14.3	15.9	-0.1	2.3
Widowed	52.7	55.0	58.9	0.9	1.4
Divorced	0.9	1.4	2.2	11.1	11.7
Total	145.1	158.6	184.6	1.9	3.3
Females:					
Married/separated	34.8	41.7	53.0	4.0	5.4
Single	25.7	30.0	36.2	3.4	4.1
Widowed	178.7	218.9	260.6	4.5	3.8
Divorced	0.8	1.4	2.8	18.0	18.3
Total	240.0	292.0	352.6	4.3	4.2
<b>Aged 65 and over</b>					
Males:					
Married/separated	647.7	764.0	868.7	3.6	2.7
Single	83.8	85.9	85.6	0.5	-0.1
Widowed	133.3	142.8	153.4	1.4	1.5
Divorced	10.6	18.1	25.7	14.1	8.3
Total	875.4	1,010.9	1,133.3	3.1	2.4
Females:					
Married/separated	439.0	538.7	642.3	4.5	3.8
Single	115.3	128.5	134.8	2.3	1.0
Widowed	561.1	662.2	753.9	3.6	2.8
Divorced	11.6	20.7	33.3	15.8	12.1
Total	1,126.9	1,350.1	1,564.2	4.0	3.2

**Source:**

1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-825.

1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-901.

1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

The decrease in the widowhood ratio from 1976 to 1986 is an extension of a long trend that goes back to 1966. Widowhood ratios for various age groups within the older population have been moving ever downward since 1966. In 1966, nearly four in ten women (39.5%) aged 65-69 who had ever been married were widowed, but

by 1986 this figure had fallen to just below one-third (32.4%). For men of similar age, the fall in the widowhood ratio from 1966 to 1986 was spectacular, from 14.8% to 7.0%. Even among women aged 75-79, there has been a marked decline in the widowhood ratio from 65.5% in 1966 to 61.8% in 1986.

**Table 5. Marital Status Distribution of the Older Population by Sex and Age Groups, Canada, 1976, 1981 and 1986**

Sex and marital status	Aged 65 - 69			Aged 70 - 74			Aged 75 - 79		
	1976	1981	1986	1976	1981	1986	1976	1981	1986
<b>Males:</b>	%								
Married/separated	82.3	83.0	83.5	77.3	78.9	80.0	70.1	72.0	74.2
Single	9.1	8.0	7.1	9.9	8.4	7.4	9.9	9.3	7.8
Widowed	7.1	6.7	6.5	11.6	10.8	10.3	19.1	17.3	16.3
Divorced	1.6	2.3	2.9	1.2	1.8	2.3	1.0	1.4	1.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Females:</b>									
Married/separated	56.0	57.6	59.6	43.3	44.6	46.8	30.0	31.2	33.0
Single	9.8	8.5	7.0	10.3	9.7	8.4	10.4	10.3	9.6
Widowed	32.7	31.5	30.1	45.3	44.1	42.5	58.9	57.5	55.8
Divorced	1.6	2.4	3.3	1.1	1.7	2.3	0.7	1.1	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 5. Marital Status Distribution of the Older Population by Sex and Age Groups, Canada, 1976, 1981 and 1986 - Concluded**

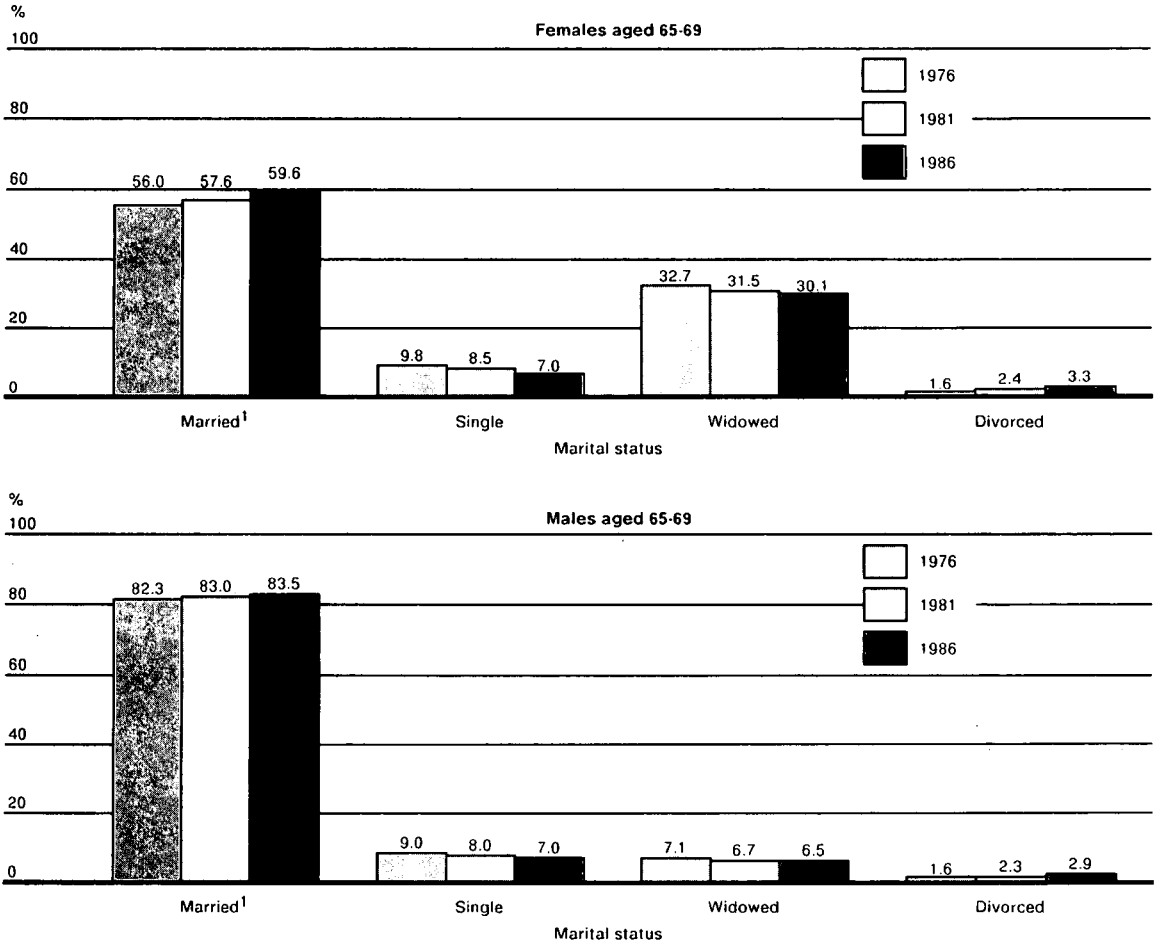
Sex and marital status	Aged 80 and over			Aged 65 and over		
	1976	1981	1986	1976	1981	1986
<b>Males:</b>	%					
Married/separated	53.2	55.4	58.3	74.0	75.6	76.7
Single	9.9	9.0	8.6	9.6	8.5	7.5
Widowed	36.3	34.7	31.9	15.2	14.1	13.5
Divorced	0.6	0.9	1.2	1.2	1.8	2.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Females:</b>						
Married/separated	14.5	14.3	15.0	39.0	39.9	41.1
Single	10.7	10.3	10.3	10.2	9.5	8.6
Widowed	74.5	75.0	73.9	49.8	49.0	48.2
Divorced	0.3	0.5	0.8	1.0	1.5	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Source:**  
 1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-825.  
 1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-901.  
 1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

The proportion of married persons at the older ages has been rising over the past 20 years. Among women aged 65 and over, the percentage married increased from 39.0% to 41.1% between 1976 and 1986. The corresponding values for men of similar age were 74.0% and 76.7%.

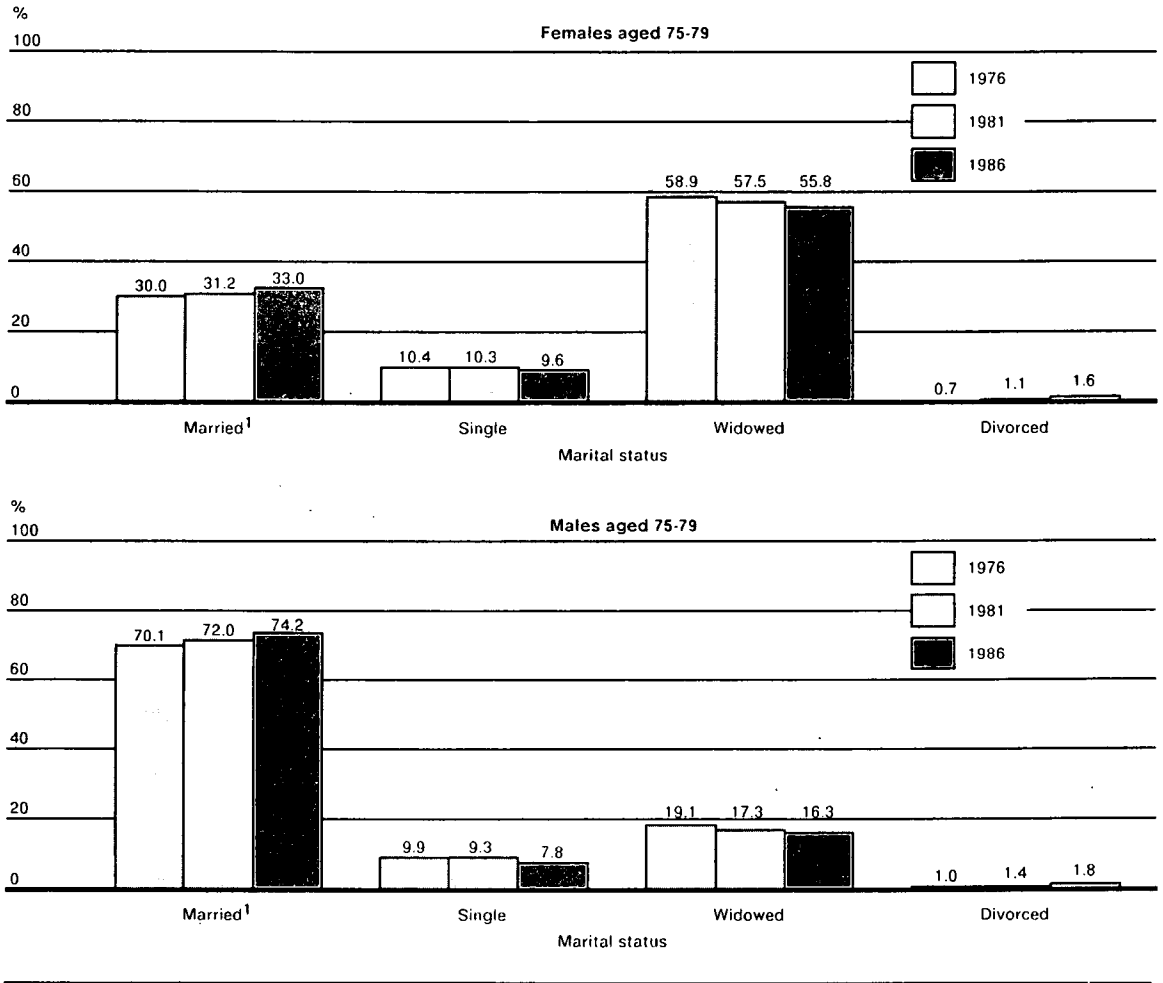
Whether the average length of life spent in families has been rising depends on the extent to which the force of the declining death rates has been offset by that of rising divorce rates.

**Chart 10. Marital Status Distribution for Two Selected Age Groups by Sex, Canada, 1976, 1981 and 1986**



See footnote and source at end of chart.

**Chart 10. Marital Status Distribution for Two Selected Age Groups by Sex, Canada, 1976, 1981 and 1986 - Concluded**



<sup>1</sup> Includes separated.

**Source:**

1976 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-825.

1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-901.

1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

## SLOWDOWN IN SHIFTS TO LIVING ALONE BELOW THE AGE OF 85

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**T**he declining widowhood rates at the older ages may mean that families with both spouses present when the oldest one reaches 65 have had improving chances of having both spouses alive and present some five to ten years later. If this is a reasonable hypothesis, one may expect a slowing down in the rate of increase in the proportions of the elderly living alone or in institutions. Table 6 shows that, for both men and women between the ages of 65 and 84 the increase in the proportion living alone has in fact slowed from the 1976-1981 to the 1981-1986 time periods. For example, between 1976 and 1981 the percentage of women aged 75-79 who lived alone increased greater than four percentage points (from 35.4% to 39.7%). In contrast, the increase was less than two points (from 39.7% to 41.6%) between 1981 and 1986. A similar pattern can be observed for women in the other age groups from 65-69 to 80-84.

However, the pattern is quite different for the 85-and-over age group. Here the percentage living alone went up sharply in both the 1976-1981 and 1981-1986 periods. For example, among women aged 85 and over, the percentages living alone in 1976, 1981 and 1986 were 22.8%, 25.5% and 28.3%, respectively. Similarly, for men aged 85 and over, the proportion living alone increased consistently from 1976 to 1981 and from 1981 to 1986 (15.1% to 16.6% and then to 18.1%).

In the 85-and-over age group, the mortality rates for men, unlike those for women, have not yet shown dramatic declines. For women in this age group, the widowhood rate decreased only slightly from 1981 to 1986. Thus the effects of mortality in reducing the number of husband-wife families has yet to be softened to any significant degree for women above age 85.

**Table 6. Percentage of Seniors Living Alone or Classified as Residents of Institutions by Sex and Age Groups, Canada, 1976, 1981 and 1986**

Selected living arrangements, age groups and sex	1976	1981	1986
Living alone		%	
<b>Males:</b>			
65-69	9.5	10.5	10.9
70-74	11.5	12.7	13.1
75-79	14.0	15.4	15.7
80-84	16.1	17.7	18.7
85 and over	15.1	16.6	18.1
<b>Females:</b>			
65-69	23.6	26.5	26.4
70-74	30.8	34.6	35.3
75-79	35.4	39.7	41.6
80-84	34.2	38.3	41.7
85 and over	22.8	25.5	28.3
<b>Living in institutions</b>			
<b>Males:</b>			
65-69	2.4	1.7	1.6
70-74	2.9	3.1	2.9
75-79	5.7	6.1	5.7
80-84	11.3	12.2	11.8
85 and over	25.2	27.1	28.4
<b>Females:</b>			
65-69	2.7	1.6	1.5
70-74	3.3	3.5	3.2
75-79	7.6	8.0	7.6
80-84	17.0	18.0	17.2
85 and over	36.5	38.4	40.5

**Source:**

Special estimates by L. Stone based on unpublished 1976 Census of Canada data. 1981 and 1986 Censuses of Canada, unpublished data. Similar data for 1986 are also published in Catalogue No. 93-104.

## DECLINES IN THE PROPORTION OF INSTITUTIONAL RESIDENTS AMONG THOSE UNDER 85

In view of the continued high widowhood rate among women aged 85 and over, it is not surprising that there has not been a slowdown in the rate of growth in the proportion of women in this age group that are classified as residents of institutions (see Table 6). Between 1976 and 1981, the percentage of women aged 85 and over in institutions increased from 36.5% to 38.4%, while from 1981 to 1986 this percentage increased at a slightly higher rate, from 38.4% to 40.5%. Such a slowdown is apparent for men aged 85 and over, however. For men in this age group, the corresponding percentages were 25.2%, 27.1% and 28.4%.

Just below the 85-and-over age range, i.e. among those aged 80-84, rates of institutionalization have gone downwards since 1981 (see Charts 11 and 12). For women in this age group, the proportion classified as residents of institutions declined from 18.0% in 1981 to 17.2% in 1986. For men of similar age the corresponding figures are 12.2% and 11.8%.

This pattern merits careful study in the light of the growing level of the debate over the need for community supports to ward off institutionalization of the elderly. To what extent is this a result of having a higher proportion of intact families in the "under 85" age range? To what degree can this pattern be attributed to improvements in community supports and functional status? These improvements have helped more of those below the most advanced ages to remain in the community at higher rates therefore. To what extent is the result an effect of policies concerning building of institutional facilities?

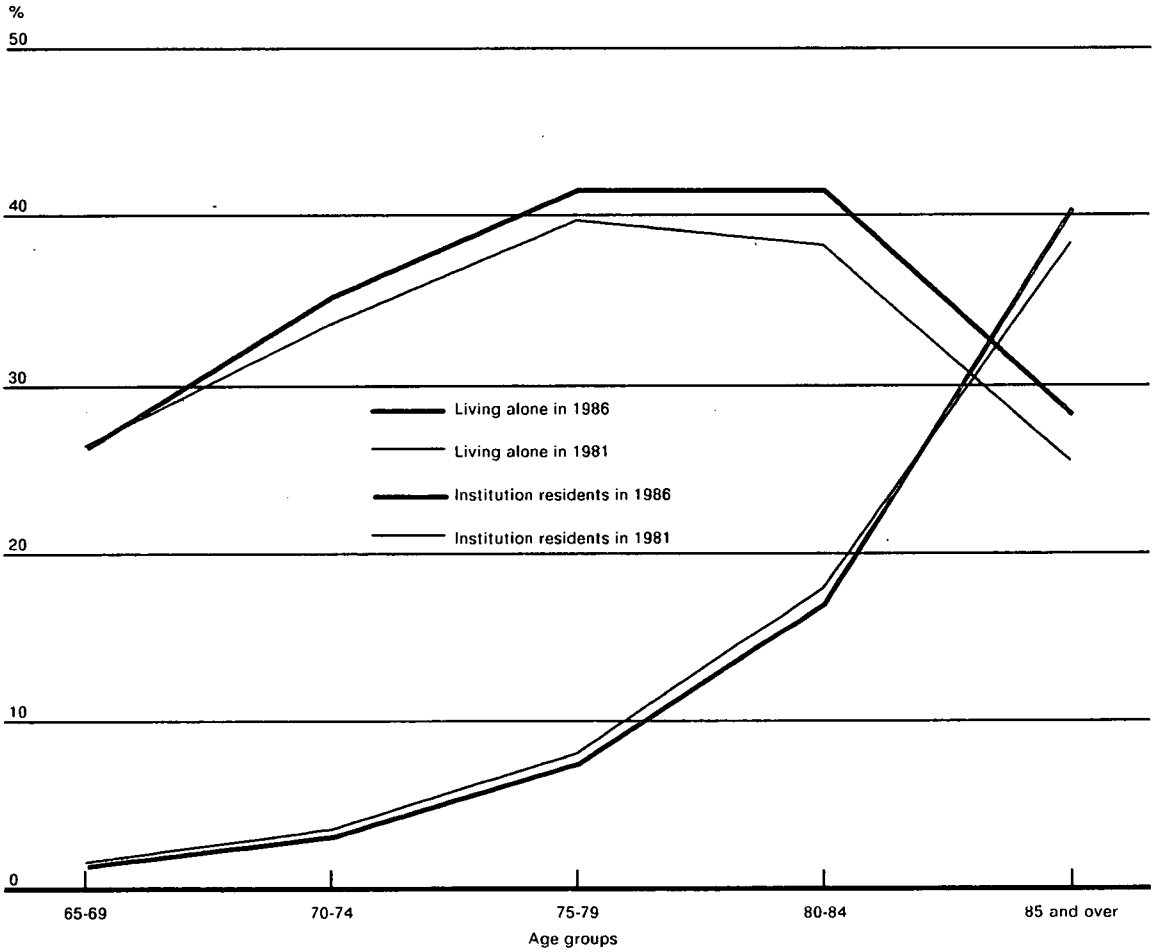
Other relevant observations can be obtained by confining the data to widowed persons. Chart 13 shows that, among widows aged 80-84, the percentage classified as residents of institutions decreased between 1981 and 1986, from 19.1% to 18.4%. For widowers of similar age, the corresponding figures for the two years were 19.6% and 19.2%. The rate of institutionalization did not fall for widowed men and women aged 85 and over between 1981 and 1986. Instead, the rate increased by slightly less than two percentage points for both sexes, from 39.6% to 41.4% for widows and from 35.4% to 37.3% for widowers in this age group.

The percentages living alone among widows and widowers aged 85 and over also increased between 1981 and 1986 (Chart 14). Since a substantial percentage of those aged 85 and over would have comparatively thin networks of family and close friends, this advance in the number and percentage of over-84-year seniors living alone merits careful study.

Strong family ties seem to be significant in affecting the chances of having to resort to institutional residence. Chart 14 shows that, in the 1986 Census of Canada, those who were still married at advanced age had far below the average (for those ages) rates of residence in institutional facilities. For example, 27.9% of married women aged 85 and over were classified as residents of institutions, while 43.7% of those who had never married and 41.4% of those who were widowed were classified as residents of institutions. A similar pattern may be observed in the 1981 Census data.

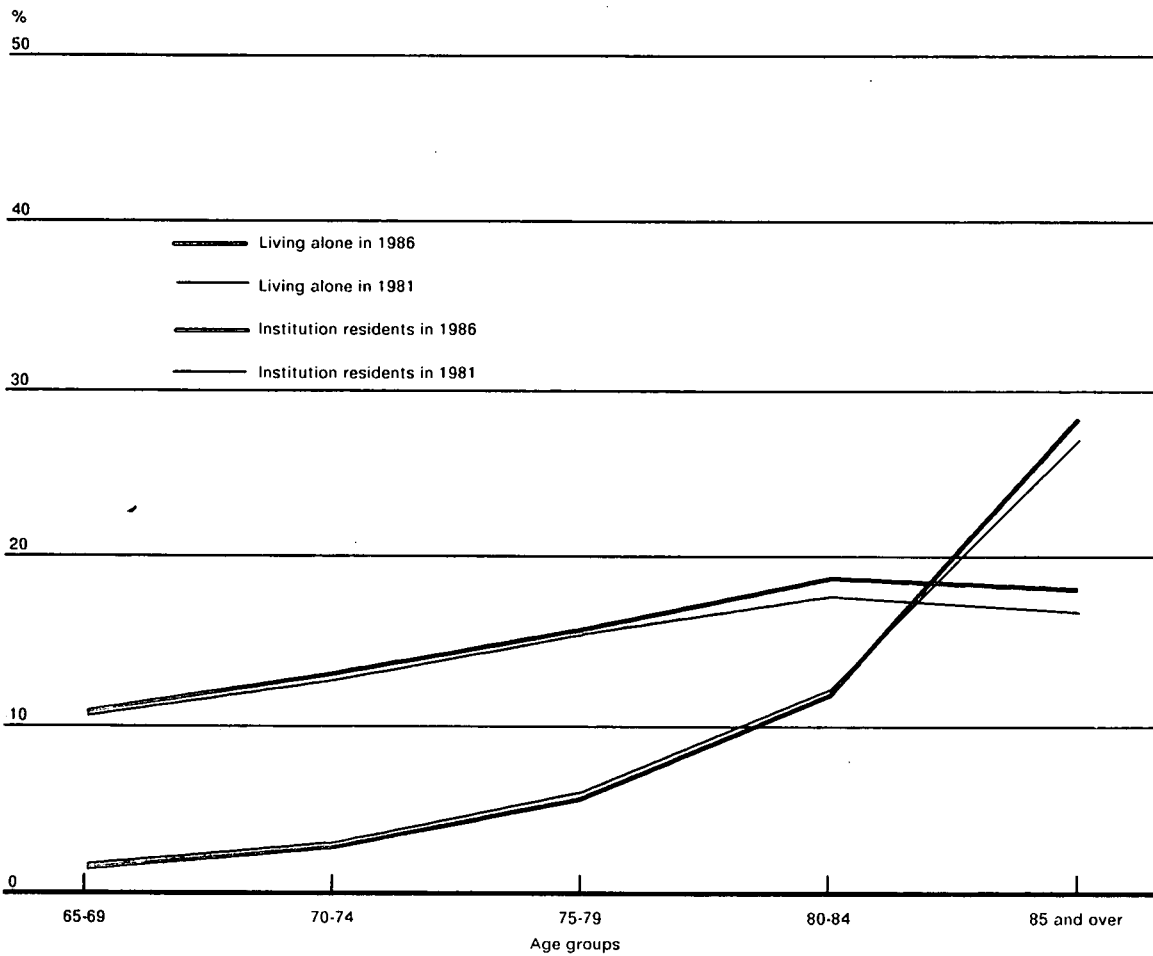


**Chart 11. Percentage of All Women Living Alone or Classified as Residents of Institutions, Selected Age Groups, Canada, 1981 and 1986**



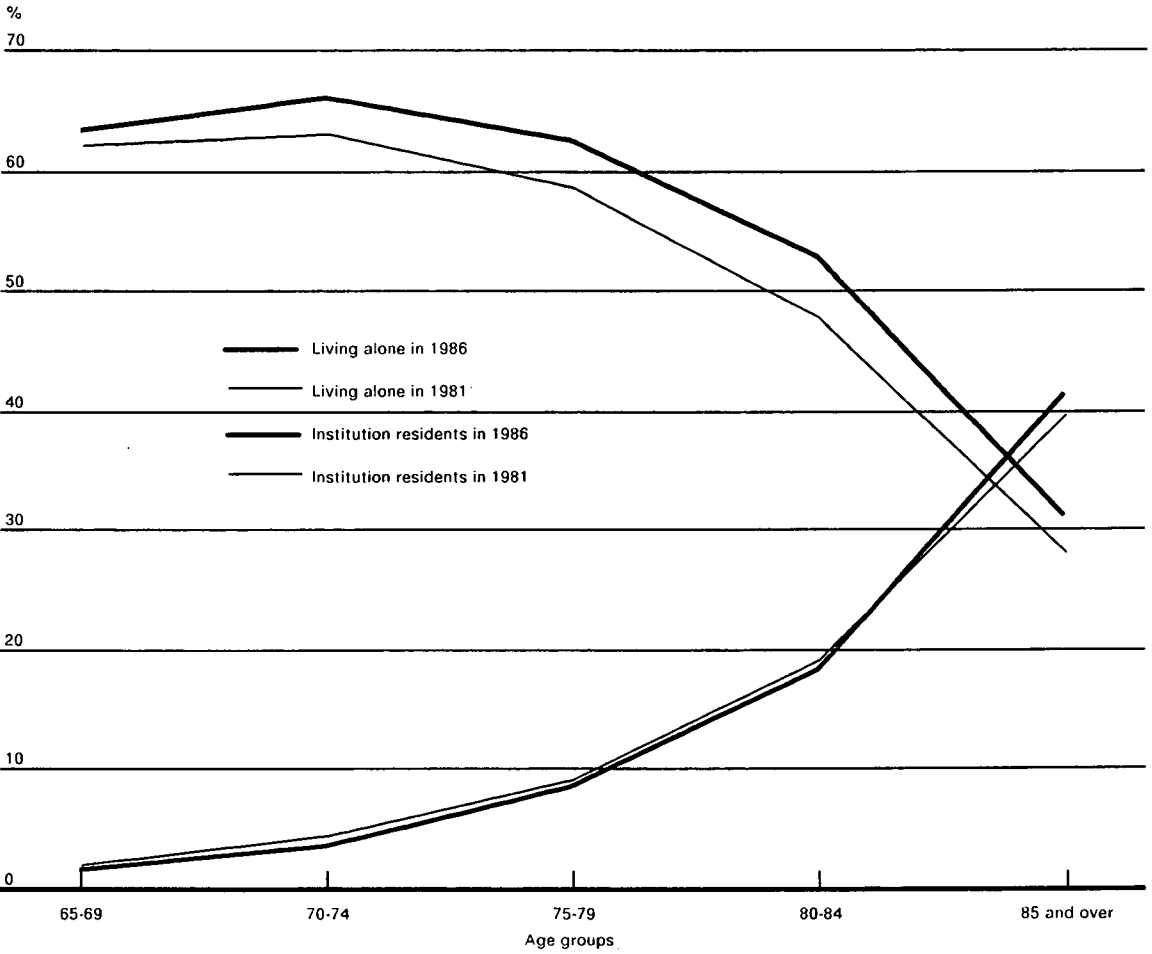
**Source:**  
1981 and 1986 Censuses of Canada, unpublished data.

**Chart 12. Percentage of All Men Living Alone or Classified as Residents of Institutions, Selected Age Groups, Canada, 1981 and 1986**



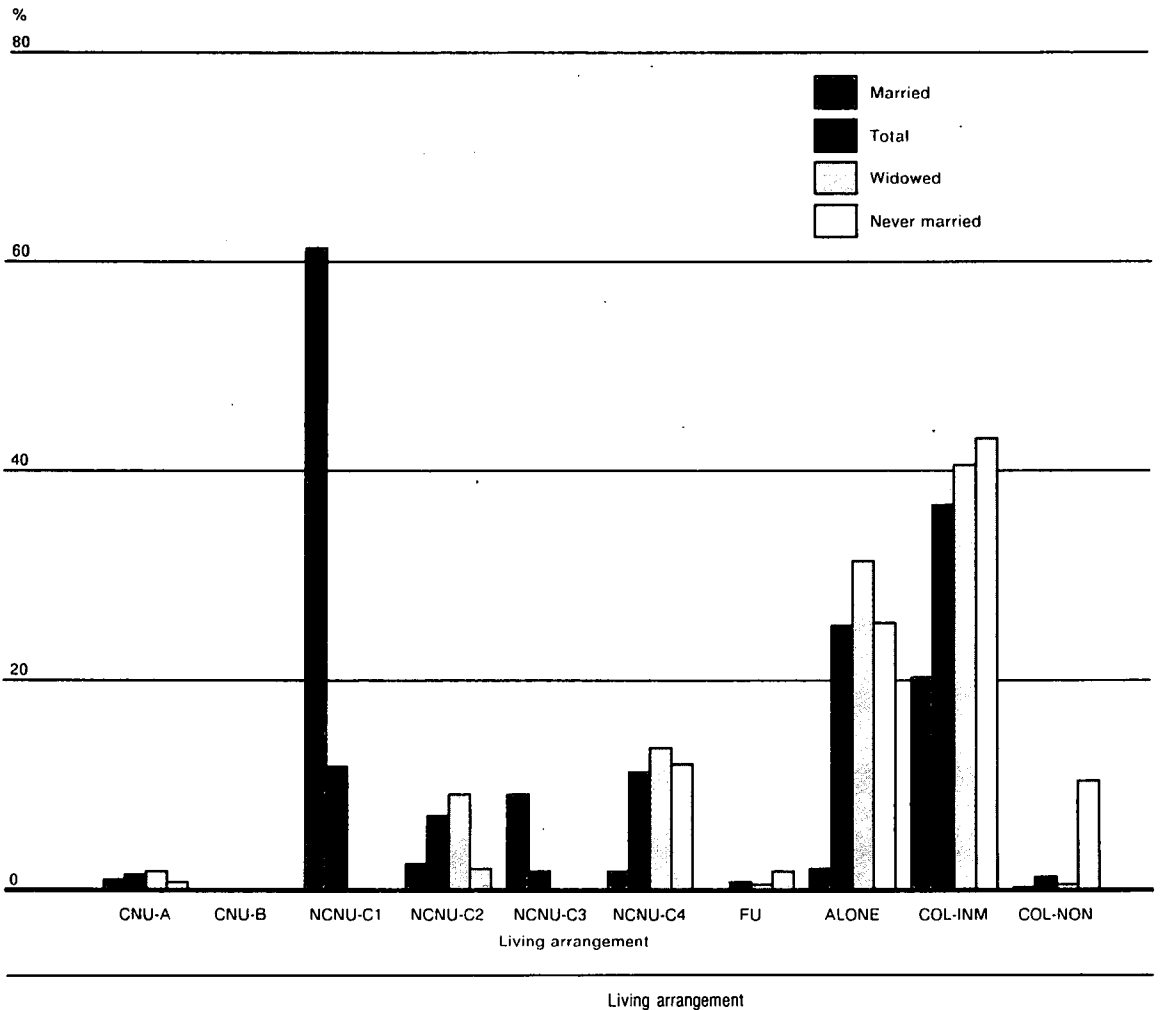
**Source:**  
1981 and 1986 Censuses of Canada, unpublished data.

**Chart 13. Percentage of Widowed Women Living Alone or Classified as Residents of Institutions, Selected Age Groups, Canada, 1981 and 1986**



**Source:**  
1981 and 1986 Censuses of Canada, unpublished data.

**Chart 14. Distribution of the Population Aged 85 and Over by Living Arrangement and Selected Marital Status Groups, Canada, 1986**



(Percentages will not add to 100 due to omission of at least one living arrangement category.)

**Definitions of the living arrangement categories**

**CNCU-A:** person lives in a couple-headed household which has a child at home, is related to Person 1 but is neither Person 1 (in the Canadian census, "Person 1" has replaced the concept of "household head") nor his/her spouse.

**CNCU-B:** person lives in a couple-headed household which has a child at home, and person IS Person 1 or his/her spouse.

**NCNU:** person lives in an economic family household which has NO child at home (in an economic family, census concept, the members are related but are not necessarily related as man and wife or parent and child)

**Subdivisions:**

- C1: person is one of two who live in a couple-only household;
- C2: person lives in a couple-headed household that has others present (i.e. at least three persons live in the household), and person is related to Person 1 but is neither Person 1 nor his/her spouse;
- C3: person lives in a couple-headed household that has others present (i.e. at least three persons live in the household), and person IS Person 1 or his/her spouse;
- C4: person lives in an economic family household that is NOT headed by a couple.

**FU:** person lives in household of non-family-related persons.

**ALONE:** person lives in one-person household.

**COL-INM:** person is a resident in an institutional collective dwelling.

**COL-NON:** person is a resident in a non-institutional collective dwelling.

**Source:**

1986 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

## DRAMATIC PROVINCIAL VARIATIONS IN THE USE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESIDENCE AMONG THE OLDEST ELDERLY

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**W**here family ties are weak, strong community supports may be influential in affecting the rate of institutionalization of those of advanced age. This hypothesis needs careful examination, especially in the light of the suggestive data from the province of Manitoba. In Canada at the time of the 1986 Census, the percentage of widowed women aged 85 and over who lived alone was 10 points below that of those living in institutions (31% versus 41%). This was not so in Manitoba, where 41% of similarly aged widows were living alone and 40% were classified as living in institutions (see Table 7).

In Canada, the percentage of widowed women aged 85 and over that lived in institutions increased from 39.6% to 41.4% between 1981 and 1986. In Manitoba, the corresponding percentage did not change over that five-year period, but remained at 40%. Meanwhile, the percentage of Manitoba widows aged 85 and over that lived alone increased very significantly, from 36% to 41%.

Although Alberta's level of institutionalization of the population aged 85 and over is well above that of Manitoba, both provinces had a similar pattern of changes in institutionalization rates over the 1981-1986 period. Among Alberta widows aged 85 and over, the percentage classified as residents of institutions was stable at just below 51% in 1981 and 1986. In the 80-84 age group of widows in Alberta,

the percentage that were residents of institutions fell from 26% in 1981 to 24% in 1986. Manitoba widows aged 80-84 also had a slightly decreased rate of institutionalization, from 16.3% to 16.0% between 1981 and 1986. In Manitoba, the percentage of widows in this age group living alone went up sharply from 60% in 1981 to 65% in 1986. The percentage of Alberta widows aged 80-84 that lived alone also increased, from 49% to 56%.

British Columbia also showed a less than average increase, compared to all of Canada, increase in the level of institutionalization for widows aged 85 and over. In that province, the increase was only one percentage point, from 43% to 44%. Also, British Columbia joined Manitoba and Alberta in showing a decline in level of institutionalization of widows aged 80-84 between 1981 and 1986 (from 19.0% to 18.3%). Again, as in Manitoba and Alberta, the percentage of British Columbia widows aged 80-84 who were living alone showed a significant increase, from 56% to nearly 60%, from 1981 to 1986.

As Table 7 shows, levels of institutionalization of the older population are much below the national average in most of Atlantic Canada. Even Prince Edward Island with its highly mature age structure, at least in comparison to that of all of Canada, had only 36% of its widowed women aged 85 and over living in institutions in 1986. The figure for Canada was 41%.

**Table 7. Percentage of Widows Aged 80-84 and 85 and Over, Living Alone or Classified as Residents of Institutions, Canada and Provinces, 1981 and 1986**

Selected age groups and geographic areas	Living alone		Living in institutions			
	1981	1986	1981	1986		
<b>Age 80-84:</b>						
Canada <sup>1</sup>	47.8	53.0	19.1	18.4		
Newfoundland	}	28.8	}	14.7		
Prince Edward Island		48.6		14.9		
Nova Scotia		39.6 <sup>2</sup>		49.5	13.7 <sup>2</sup>	12.7
New Brunswick		48.6		13.5		
Quebec		34.2		42.1	21.9	20.7
Ontario	51.1	55.3	18.3	17.7		
Manitoba	60.3	65.1	16.3	16.0		
Saskatchewan	60.7	65.1	18.3	16.6		
Alberta	49.1	55.9	25.7	24.2		
British Columbia	56.1	59.7	19.0	18.3		
<b>Age 85 and over:</b>						
Canada <sup>1</sup>	28.0	31.2	39.6	41.4		
Newfoundland	}	13.9	}	33.1		
Prince Edward Island		25.8		36.1		
Nova Scotia		22.1 <sup>2</sup>		29.7	29.2 <sup>2</sup>	29.9
New Brunswick		28.4		35.8		
Quebec		17.7		21.7	38.2	41.5
Ontario	30.5	33.3	39.6	40.9		
Manitoba	35.6	41.0	40.0	40.1		
Saskatchewan	34.5	38.2	40.6	44.1		
Alberta	26.4	31.2	50.9	50.5		
British Columbia	33.3	35.4	42.6	44.0		

<sup>1</sup> Includes the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

<sup>2</sup> Separate data for the Atlantic provinces are not available for 1981. Data shown are for the four provinces combined.

**Source:**

1981 and 1986 Censuses of Canada, unpublished data. Similar data for 1986 are also published in Catalogue No. 93-104.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

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In conclusion, the 1986 Census has confirmed that there are big aging-related issues abroad in Canada today. Many of them are linked to the very rapid rate of growth of the number of Canadians of advanced age, as well as to aspects of the aging of major cohorts. Since neither rapid growth in number of the oldest Canadians nor cohort aging are implied by **population aging** (an increase in the proportion of older persons within the total population), it is apparent that important aging-related developments can take place independently of what is happening to population aging.

A bibliography can be obtained from the author.

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