

# The Daily

Statistics Canada

Monday, December 14, 1998

For release at 8:30 a.m.

## MAJOR RELEASES

● **Canada's Aboriginal languages, 1996**

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During the past century, some 10 once-flourishing Aboriginal languages have become extinct, and at least a dozen are in a precarious situation. As of 1996, only three of Canada's some 50 Aboriginal languages - Cree, Inuktitut and Ojibway - had large enough populations to be considered truly secure from the threat of extinction in the long run.

*(continued on following page)*



### Canadian social trends

Winter 1998

The winter 1998 issue of *Canadian social trends* features the following articles: "Canada's Aboriginal languages", "Paying off student loans", "Literacy: does language make a difference?", "Skill deficits among the young," and "Ice storm '98!".

Each quarter, *Canadian social trends* integrates data from many sources to examine emerging social trends and issues. It also features the latest social indicators, as well as information about Statistics Canada's products and services.

The winter 1998 issue of *Canadian social trends* (11-008-XPE, \$11/\$36) is now available. See *How to order publications*.

For further information, contact Susan Crompton (613-951-2556), Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division.



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## MAJOR RELEASES

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### Canada's Aboriginal languages

1996

During the past 100 years or more, some 10 of Canada's once-flourishing Aboriginal languages have become extinct, and at least a dozen are on the brink.

As of 1996, only three out of 50 Aboriginal languages - Cree, Inuktitut and Ojibway - had large enough populations to be considered truly secure from the threat of extinction in the long run. This is not surprising in light of the current situation. Of some 800,000 persons who claimed an Aboriginal identity in 1996, only 26% said an Aboriginal language was their mother tongue, and even fewer spoke it at home.

The 50 Aboriginal languages belong to 11 major language families - 10 First Nations and Inuktitut. Some of these families are large and strong, others small and vulnerable.

The three largest families together represent 93% of persons with an Aboriginal mother tongue. About 147,000 people have Algonquian as mother tongue, the family that includes Cree and Ojibway. Another 28,000 have Inuktitut, and 20,000 have Athapaskan. The remaining eight language families account for 7% of persons with an Aboriginal mother tongue, an indication of these languages' relative size.

Since a large base of speakers is among the essential factors to ensure long-term viability, the more speakers a language has, the better are its chances of survival. Inuktitut, Cree and Ojibway all boast more than 20,000 people with an Aboriginal mother tongue.

In contrast, endangered languages rarely have more than a few thousand speakers, and often they have only a few hundred. For instance, the two smallest and weakest language groups, Kutenai and Tlingit, have mother tongue populations of only 120 and 145 respectively.

#### Aboriginal languages underwent steady erosion between 1981 and 1996

Between 1981 and 1996, most Aboriginal languages experienced a steady erosion in linguistic vitality. Although the number of people reporting an Aboriginal mother tongue increased nearly 24% during the 15-year period, the number of those who spoke an Aboriginal language at home grew only 7%.

As a result, for every 100 people with an Aboriginal mother tongue, the number whose home language was most often an indigenous language declined from 76 in 1981 to 65 in 1996.

#### Note to readers

*This report is based on an article in the publication Canadian social trends that explores which of Canada's Aboriginal languages are flourishing and which are in danger of disappearing.*

*The article examines the factors that differentiate viable languages from endangered ones. In addition, it compares language use and maintenance patterns between 1981 and 1996 to understand what happened to Aboriginal languages over the years, and what the future may hold for them.*

*The article uses data from the 1981 to 1996 censuses as well as the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey. The 1996 Aboriginal identity population includes those people who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuit. In 1991 and in previous censuses, the Aboriginal population was defined using the ethnic origin question based primarily on ancestry. Because of changes in concepts and measures of the Aboriginal population over time, the time-series analysis from the census is restricted to language-based data only.*

Endangered languages experienced the largest declines. For example, for every 100 individuals with Salish languages as a mother tongue, the number who used it at home fell from 35 in 1981 to only 12 by 1996. Tlingit and Kutenai had practically disappeared by the 1990s as languages most often spoken at home.

The use of Cree at home declined as well, but by considerably less than other languages. For every 100 individuals with Cree as a mother tongue, the number who used it at home declined from 78 in 1981 to 65 in 1996.

#### The younger the speakers, the healthier the language

Age plays an important role in maintaining a language. The younger those who speak a language, the healthier it becomes. Problems for a language arise in communities in which the average age of speakers is higher. As the elders in such communities who speak the language die, the language might too.

Overall, the average age of the population with an Aboriginal mother tongue was 31 in 1996, up from 28 in 1981. Meanwhile, the average age of individuals who spoke an Aboriginal language at home also increased during the 15-year period, but to a lesser extent. It was 27 in 1996, up from 25 in 1981.

There are two reasons why people with indigenous languages as a mother tongue are getting older. First, although fertility rates are still high, they are declining, translating into relatively fewer children. Second,

the proportion of the Aboriginal population with an indigenous mother tongue is decreasing with younger generations.

In 1996, only one-fifth (20%) of children under age five had an indigenous mother tongue. In contrast, 60% of those aged 85 and over and 30% of those aged 40 to 44 reported an Aboriginal mother tongue.

### **Loss of an Aboriginal language most pronounced in the working-age population**

The loss of a language appears to depend greatly on the stage of life through which people are going. Young children have not yet had time or reason to shift from their mother tongue to another language. For most of them, their mother tongue is, therefore, the same as their home language.

For example, for every 100 children under age five in 1981, 91 spoke their mother tongue at home. However, in 1996, when these children were in their mid- to late-teens, only 76 still used their mother tongue as their home language. This indicates a serious loss in home language, but the decline did not stop there.

As youth move out of the original family home, marriage, entry into the labour force, and a different,

often large, urban environment can further accelerate their language decline. While this was true for both sexes, it was particularly noticeable among women. One reason may be that they are more likely than men to leave reserves for other locations where the chances of marrying non-Aboriginal people are higher.

Erosion of languages can be difficult to resist if an individual does not have the support of a closely-knit community and is immersed in the language and culture of the dominant society.

Aboriginal elders, teachers and other leaders are well aware of the gravity of the linguistic situation, however, and are taking steps to preserve indigenous languages. These include such measures as language instruction programs, Aboriginal media programming, and the recording of elders' stories, songs and accounts of history in the Aboriginal language.

The Winter 1998 edition of *Canadian social trends* (11-008-XPE, \$11) is now available. See *How to order publications*.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact Mary Jane Norris (613-951-2316), Demography Division. ■

## OTHER RELEASES

### Federal government finance: Assets and liabilities

March 31, 1998

At March 31, 1998, the federal government's net debt (which is defined as the excess of liabilities over financial assets) reached \$584.4 billion, a decrease of \$4.0 billion (-0.7%) over March 31, 1997. The financial assets stood at \$64.3 billion, while total liabilities reached \$648.7 billion.

The net debt, as a share of gross domestic product, decreased for a third consecutive year from 71.0% in 1997 to 67.5% in 1998. The net debt per capita receded 1.7% to \$19,342 compared with the previous year.

The Financial Management System (FMS) provides a standardized presentation of government accounting for the federal, provincial and local governments in Canada. The individual governments' accounting systems are not directly comparable because the policies and structure of governments differ.

The FMS adjusts data from governments Public Accounts and other records to provide detailed data that permit inter-government comparisons as well as compatible national aggregates that are consistent over time. In other words, FMS statistics may not accord with the figures published in government financial statements. A reconciliation statement of the two presentations is available.

#### Federal government net debt

	Net debt March 31	Net debt percentage of GDP	Net debt per capita
	\$ millions	%	\$
1971	18,581	20.6	863
1975	24,769	16.1	1,075
1980	72,555	25.9	2,971
1985	209,891	46.7	8,143
1990	362,920	55.3	13,160
1991	395,071	58.3	14,141
1992	428,682	62.7	15,162
1993	470,046	67.3	16,425
1994	513,219	70.8	17,735
1995	550,685	72.2	18,820
1996	578,718	71.7	19,566
1997	588,465	71.0	19,677
1998	584,449	67.5	19,342

Available on CANSIM: matrices 3198-3200.

Data are available through custom and special tabulation. For more information about products and services, contact Viola Jabbour (613-951-0767; [jabbvio@statcan.ca](mailto:jabbvio@statcan.ca)), Public Institutions Division.

For further information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact A.J. Gareau (613-951-1826) or Robert Larocque (613-951-1836), Public Institutions Division. ■

### Railway carloadings

Nine-day period ending November 30, 1998

Carloadings of freight (excluding intermodal traffic) during the nine-day period ending November 30, 1998, decreased 1.7% to 6.0 million tonnes from the same period last year. The number of cars loaded also decreased 1.6%.

Intermodal traffic (piggyback) tonnage totaled 452 000 tonnes, a 6.5% increase from the same period last year. The year-to-date figures were down 1.3%.

Total traffic (carloadings of freight and intermodal traffic) decreased 1.1% during the period. This brought the year-to-date total to 236.0 million tonnes, down 3.0% from the previous year.

All year-to-date figures have been revised.

For further information, or to on this release, contact Robert Larocque (613-951-2486; fax: 613-951-0009; [laroque@statcan.ca](mailto:laroque@statcan.ca)), Transportation Division. ■

### Oils and fats

October 1998

Production of all types of deodorized oils in October totalled 112 662 tonnes, an increase of 1.9% from 110 531 tonnes in September. Year-to-date production to the end of October, totalled 1 032 731 tonnes, down 0.4% from 1 036 444 tonnes a year earlier.

The domestic sales of deodorized margarine oil totalled 12 434 tonnes, deodorized shortening oil totalled 29 551 tonnes and deodorized salad oil totalled 34 677 tonnes in October.

Available on CANSIM: matrix 185.

The October 1998 issue of *Oils and fats* (32-006-XIB, \$5/\$47) is now available on the Internet. See *How to order publications*.

For further information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact Peter Zylstra (613-951-3511; [zylspet@statcan.ca](mailto:zylspet@statcan.ca)), Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. ■

## **Cement**

October 1998

Manufacturers shipped 1 305 211 tonnes of cement in October, up 4.3% from 1 250 574 tonnes in October 1997 and down 4.4% from 1 365 137 tonnes in September 1998.

For January to October 1998, shipments totalled 10 243 350 tonnes, up 3.1% from 9 938 086 tonnes during the same period in 1997.

**Available on CANSIM: matrices 92 and 122 (series 35).**

The October 1998 issue of *Cement* (44-001-XIB, \$5/\$47) is now available. See *How to order publications*.

For further information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods and data quality of this release, contact Donna Faghali (613-951-3518; [sainteti@statcan.ca](mailto:sainteti@statcan.ca)), Manufacturing, Construction and Energy Division. ■

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## PUBLICATIONS RELEASED

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**Canadian social trends**, Winter 1998  
**Catalogue number 11-008-XPE**  
(Canada: \$11/\$36; outside Canada: US\$11/US\$36).

**Oil and fats**, October 1998  
**Catalogue number 32-006-XIB**  
(Canada: \$5/\$47; outside Canada: US\$5/US\$47).

**Cement**, October 1998  
**Catalogue number 44-001-XIB**  
(Canada: \$5/\$47; outside Canada: US\$5/US\$47).

**Industrial chemicals and synthetic resins**,  
October 1998  
**Catalogue number 46-002-XPB**  
(Canada: \$7/\$62; outside Canada: US\$7/US\$62).

**Oil pipeline transport**, September 1998  
**Catalogue number 55-001-XPB**  
(Canada: \$12/\$114; outside Canada: US\$12/US\$114).

**All prices exclude sales tax.**

Catalogue numbers with an -XIB or an -XIE extension are Internet versions; those with -XMB or -XME are microfiche; and -XPB or -XPE denote a paper version.

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### How to order publications

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Thursday, June 9, 1997  
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**MAJOR RELEASES**

- **Urban transit, 1995** 2  
Despite the emphasis on taking urban transit, Canadians are using it less and less. In 1995, each Canadian took an average of about 65 trips on some form of urban transit, the lowest level in the past 25 years.
- **Productivity, hourly compensation and unit labour cost, 1996** 4  
Growth in productivity among Canadian businesses was notably weak again in 1996, accompanied by sluggish gains in employment and slow nominal growth during the year.

**OTHER RELEASES**

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