

## Census in Brief

# Same-sex couples in Canada in 2016

Census of Population, 2016

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- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| .              | not available for any reference period   |
| ..             | not available for a specific reference period  |
| ...            | not applicable   |
| 0              | true zero or a value rounded to zero   |
| 0 <sup>s</sup> | value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded |
| <sup>p</sup>   | preliminary  |
| <sup>r</sup>   | revised  |
| x              | suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i>                                   |
| <sup>E</sup>   | use with caution   |
| F              | too unreliable to be published   |
| *              | significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )   |

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## Highlights

- According to the 2016 Census, there were 72,880 same-sex couples in Canada in 2016, representing 0.9% of all couples.
- From 2006 to 2016, the number of same-sex couples increased much more rapidly (+60.7%) than the number of opposite-sex couples (+9.6%).
- One-third (33.4%) of all same-sex couples in Canada in 2016 were married.
- Although Ontario had the most same-sex couples (26,585), Quebec had a higher number relative to its population. Among provinces, Quebec also had the lowest percentage of married same-sex couples.
- Half of all same-sex couples in Canada were living in four of the country's five largest census metropolitan areas: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, and Ottawa–Gatineau.
- About one in eight same-sex couples (12.0%) had children living with them in 2016, compared with about half of opposite-sex couples.

## Introduction

The Census of Population provides important information on small population groups with diverse characteristics. One of these groups is same-sex couples. In 2001, the census first counted same-sex couples living together in common-law unions. In 2005, marriage became legal for same-sex couples across Canada,<sup>1</sup> and in the following censuses, in 2006, 2011 and 2016, both married and common-law same-sex couples were enumerated.

Census data about the number of same-sex couples in Canada and their characteristics—such as whether they are married or living common law, whether they are raising children or not, and where they live—can shed light on an aspect of inclusiveness in Canadian society.

The rich set of socioeconomic characteristics collected by the Census of Population can be used by policy makers, employers, health care service providers, and others to evaluate and meet the needs of all couples and their children in Canada.

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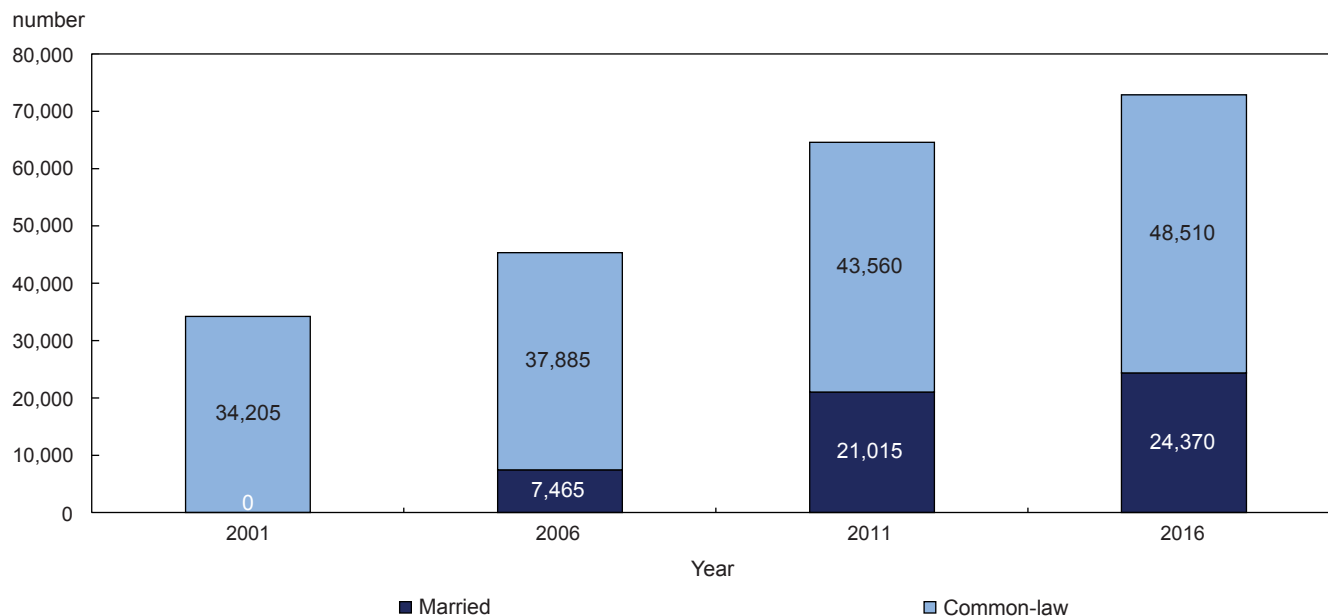
1. The *Civil Marriage Act*, which legalized same-sex marriage in Canada, was adopted in July 2005. Some provinces had already legalized same-sex marriage by this time, beginning with Ontario in 2003.

## Same-sex couples in Canada in 2016

### Nearly 1% of all couples in Canada are same-sex couples

Since 2001, the number of same-sex couples in Canada has grown considerably. From 2011 to 2016, the number of same-sex couples rose by 12.9%, to 72,880 couples. Over the 10 years from 2006 to 2016, it increased by 60.7%. In comparison, the number of opposite-sex couples increased by 9.6% from 2006 to 2016.

**Chart 1**  
**Same-sex couples, by conjugal status, Canada, 2001 to 2016**



**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016.

In 2016, same-sex couples represented 0.9% of all couples in Canada (see Text box 1 for international comparisons).

There were slightly more male (51.9%) than female (48.1%) same-sex couples in Canada in 2016. This difference has gradually narrowed with each census. For example, 55.5% of same-sex couples were male and 44.5% were female in 2001.

In 2016, the 145,765 individuals in a same-sex marriage or common-law partnership represented 0.5% of all adults aged 15 and older living in private households in Canada.

The average age of these individuals was 46.4 years, which is 5 years less than that of individuals in opposite-sex couples (51.6 years).

### Text box 1: International comparisons of same-sex couples

Several European countries, Australia, and the United States have published percentages of same-sex couples in their countries for the last several years. Although not all of these proportions are directly comparable or are for the same time frame, Canada's data in 2016 appear to be in the same range or higher. Same-sex marriage has not been legally recognized in all of these countries.

In Germany, same-sex couples represented 0.5% of all couples in 2015. This is lower than Canada's percentage of 0.9% in 2016.

In the United Kingdom, same-sex couple families represented 0.9% of all families in 2016.

In the United States, same-sex couple households represented 1.4% of total couple households in 2015. "Couple households" are when the "householder" reports having a spouse or unmarried partner in the household.

In Australia, same-sex couples represented 0.7% of all couples in 2011.

In Ireland, same-sex couples represented 0.4% of all couples in 2011.<sup>2</sup>

### One-third of same-sex couples are married

In May 2006, shortly after same-sex marriage became legal in Canada (July 2005), the census counted 7,465 married same-sex couples. This number has more than tripled in the 10 years since, while the number of same-sex common-law couples has risen by 28.0%. In 2016, married spouses represented one-third (33.4%) of all same-sex couples in Canada, with a slightly higher percentage among female couples (35.9%) than male couples (31.2%).

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2. Statistisches Bundesamt. 2017. *Households and Families* (<https://www.destatis.de/EN/FactsFigures/SocietyState/Population/HouseholdsFamilies/HouseholdsFamilies.html>).
  - Office for National Statistics. 2016. *Statistical Bulletin: Families and Households in the UK: 2016* (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/bulletins/familiesandhouseholds/2016>).
  - United States Census Bureau. 2015. *Characteristics of Same-sex Couple Households: 2005 to Present* (<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/same-sex-couples/ssc-house-characteristics.html>).
  - Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2012. *Counts of Same-sex Couples in the 2011 Census* (<http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/factsheetssc?opendocument&navpos=450>).
  - Central Statistics Office. 2012. *Profile 5: Households and Families* ([http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile5/Profile\\_5\\_Households\\_and\\_Families\\_full\\_doc\\_sig\\_amended.pdf](http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile5/Profile_5_Households_and_Families_full_doc_sig_amended.pdf)).

# Same-sex couples in Canada in 2016

**Table 1**  
**Same-sex couples, by conjugal status, Canada, 2001 to 2016**

Year	Total	Married	Living common law
		number	
2016	72,880	24,370	48,510
2011	64,580	21,015	43,560
2006	45,350	7,465	37,885
2001	34,205	...	34,205
Period	percent change		
2011 to 2016	12.9	16.0	11.4
2006 to 2016	60.7	226.5	28.0
2001 to 2016	113.1	...	41.8

... not applicable

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2016.

In Quebec, marriage has been less popular among all couples living together than in other provinces for some time. In 2016, the proportion of married same-sex couples in Quebec was less than one-quarter (22.5%). In all other provinces, the proportion of married same-sex couples was at least one-third.

## Ontario has the most same-sex couples, but Quebec has more relative to its population

As in previous censuses, Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia had the most same-sex couples in 2016, but other provinces have been increasing their share. The total share of Canada's same-sex couples living in these three provinces (the three largest) declined from 84.3% in 2006 to 81.2% in 2016.

In 2016, Ontario continued to have the most same-sex couples of all the provinces, with 26,585 couples, or 53,165 individuals. However, both Quebec and British Columbia had more people living as part of same-sex couples relative to their total adult populations (aged 15 and older). While this percentage was 0.5% for Ontario in 2016, it was 0.6% for Quebec and British Columbia.

## Same-sex couples are living mainly in Canada's largest metropolitan areas

In 2016, half of Canada's 72,880 same-sex couples lived in four of the country's five largest census metropolitan areas (**CMAs** (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/geo009-eng.cfm>)): Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, and Ottawa–Gatineau. Ten years earlier, in 2006, Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver accounted for half of all same-sex couples, without counting those living in Ottawa–Gatineau.

The concentration of same-sex couples in a few large CMAs has shifted to other large urban centres in Canada. For example, from 2006 to 2016, the number of same-sex couples doubled in the CMAs of Edmonton and Québec, and it increased by about 85% in the CMAs of Winnipeg and Calgary. The remaining urban centres in 2016 where at least 1,000 same-sex couples lived were the CMAs of Halifax, Hamilton, Victoria, and London. Since 2006, the number of same-sex couples in these CMAs has increased by between 58% and 74%.

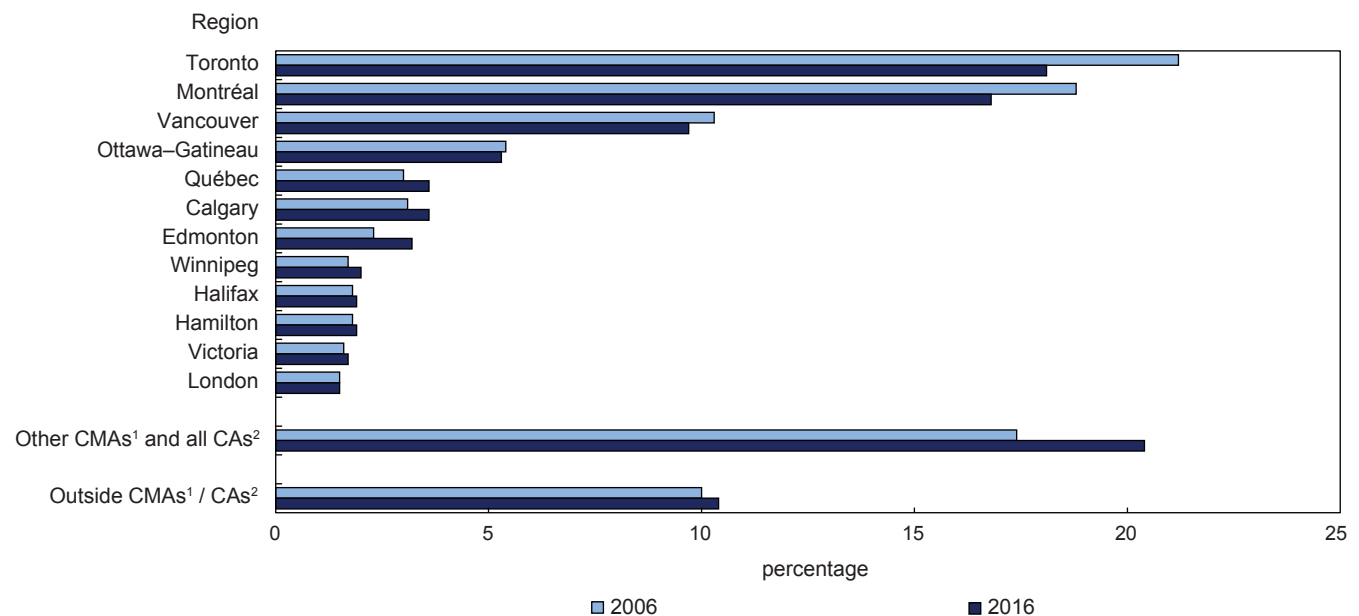
## Same-sex couples in Canada in 2016

The remaining CMAs and all smaller urban centres (called [census agglomerations](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/geo009-eng.cfm), CAs) were home to 20.4% of all same-sex couples in 2016, up from 17.4% in 2006. Meanwhile, the total population share of these areas remained constant at around 26%.

Outside of the CMAs and CAs, smaller towns and rural areas maintained their share of all same-sex couples at 10.4%, despite their share of the total population decreasing from 18.9% in 2006 to 16.8% in 2016.

**Chart 2**

**Distribution of same-sex couples, by selected census metropolitan area and other regions, 2006 and 2016**



1. CMA refers to census metropolitan area.

2. CA refers to census agglomeration.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006 and 2016.

## Increasing number of same-sex couples living with children

In Canada in 2016, about one-eighth (12.0%) of all same-sex couples had children living with them, compared with about half (51.4%) of opposite-sex couples. This includes parents and children of all ages, although, on average, same-sex couples were younger than opposite-sex couples.

Their children may be biological or adopted. There may also be a stepfamily relationship, meaning that the child or children came into the life of one of the partners before the current couple relationship.

The percentage of same-sex couples, male and female couples combined, who had children living with them rose steadily over 15 years, from 8.6% in 2001 to 12.0% in 2016.

One notable difference between male and female same-sex couples is the proportion who were living with children. Female couples accounted for four-fifths of the 8,770 same-sex couples who were living with children in 2016. This ratio has stayed constant since the 2001 Census.

At the time of the 2016 Census, 10,020 children aged 0 to 14 were living in a family with same-sex parents. About half of these parents were married, although more male parent couples (59.8%) than female parent couples (49.7%) were married.

## Data sources, methods and definitions

### Data sources

The data in this analysis are from the 2016 Census of Population. Further information on the census can be found in the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

In the 2011 Census, there may have been an overestimation of married same-sex couples. This in turn affected the total count of same-sex couples, as well as the growth rate of these couples between 2011 and 2016. The degree of overestimation was evaluated to be between 0 and 4,500 couples in 2011 at the national level. The data have not been adjusted.

Census data about same-sex couples and opposite-sex couples are about couples who live together. They are not about sexual orientation in the population at large. The Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) includes a question on sexual orientation. In 2014, 1.7% of Canadian adults between the ages of 18 and 59 reported themselves to be homosexual (gay or lesbian) and 1.3% reported themselves to be bisexual.

Additional information on census data quality and comparability for families, households and marital status can be found in the [Families Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/002/98-500-x2016002-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/002/98-500-x2016002-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-500-X2016002.

### Methods

**Random rounding and percentage distributions:** To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2016 Census, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values, since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%.

Due to random rounding, counts and percentages may vary slightly between different census products, such as the analytical documents, highlight tables, and data tables.

### Definitions

Please refer to the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-301-X, for additional information on the census variables.

## Additional information

Additional analyses on families, households and marital status can be found in [The Daily](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170802/dq170802a-eng.htm) (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170802/dq170802a-eng.htm>) of August 2, 2017, and in the Census in Brief articles entitled [Portrait of children's family life in Canada in 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016006/98-200-x2016006-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016006/98-200-x2016006-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016006, and [Young adults living with their parents in Canada in 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016008/98-200-x2016008-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016008/98-200-x2016008-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016008.

Additional information on families, households and marital status can be found in the [Highlight tables](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/fam/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/fam/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-402-X2016004; the [Data tables](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Lp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=0&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2016&THEME=117&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Lp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=0&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2016&THEME=117&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>), Catalogue nos. 98-400-X20160024 to 98-400-X2016041;



## Same-sex couples in Canada in 2016

the [Census Profile](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>), Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001; and the [Focus on Geography Series](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-404-X2016001.

[Thematic maps](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/geo/map-carte/ref/thematic-thematiques/fam/thematic-thematiques-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/geo/map-carte/ref/thematic-thematiques/fam/thematic-thematiques-eng.cfm>) for this topic are also available for various levels of geography.

A video providing an overview of Canadian families in the past and today is available from the [Video centre](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/video/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/video/index-eng.cfm>).

An infographic entitled [Portrait of households and families in Canada, 2016 Census of Population](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017024-eng.htm) (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017024-eng.htm>) also illustrates some key findings on families and households in Canada.

For details on the concepts, definitions and variables used in the 2016 Census of Population, please consult the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

In addition to response rates and other data quality information, the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-304-X, provides an overview of the various phases of the census, including content determination, sampling design, collection, data processing, data quality assessment, confidentiality guidelines and dissemination.

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