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Canadian Megatrends

Life expectancy, 1920–1922 to 2009–2011



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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^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- ^P preliminary
- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- ^E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

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Life expectancy, 1920–1922 to 2009–2011

CANADIAN MEGATRENDS

On the journey of life, the commuting time for each of us is different. Life expectancy—an indicator widely used to explore the general health of a population—is an estimate of the average number of years someone is expected to live from birth or another age, based on death rates calculated for a specific period. Obviously, this is just an average; not everyone will live for precisely the expected length of time. Those who live longer than their life expectancy have often benefited from developments that extend life, such as advancements in the treatment and prevention of disease.

Improvements in life expectancy in Canada

Life expectancy in Canada has greatly improved since the early 20th century. The life expectancy at birth for men has increased by 20.5 years, from 58.8 years in 1920–1922 to 79.3 years in 2009–2011. During the same period, the life expectancy of women increased by 23.0 years, from 60.6 years to 83.6 years.

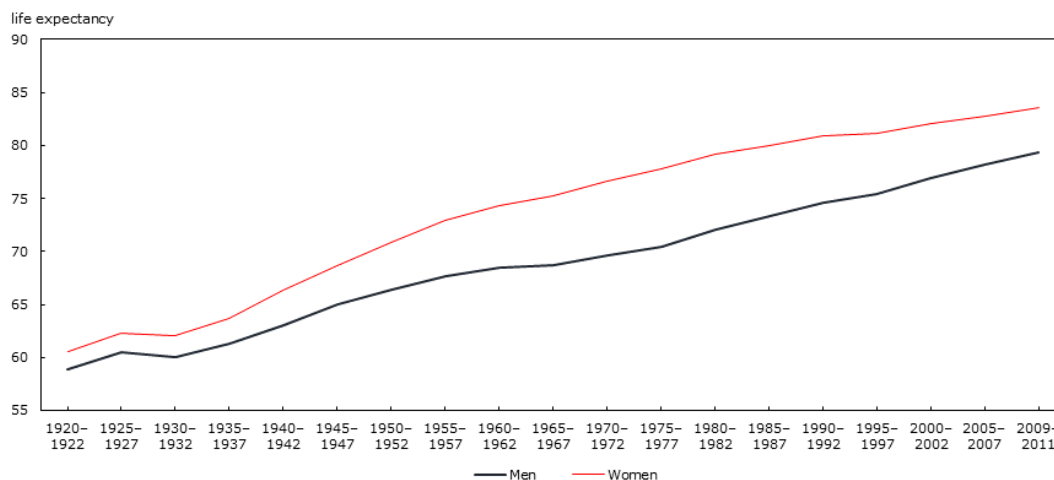
Life expectancy has historically been lower for men than for women. While the gap was small in 1920–1922 (1.8 years), it reached a high of 7.3 years in 1975–1977 and narrowed to 4.3 years in 2009–2011.

The widening of the gap was partly the result of fewer women dying during childbirth. The narrowing was related to the decline in deaths caused by cardiovascular diseases, which generally affect men more than women.

Life expectancy at birth

Lower life expectancy at birth during the early 20th century was, in part, a reflection of high levels of infant mortality. About 1 in 10 Canadian babies died within the first year of life in 1921, compared with about 1 in 200 in 2011.

Chart 1
Life expectancy at birth by sex, Canada, 1920–1922 to 2009–2011



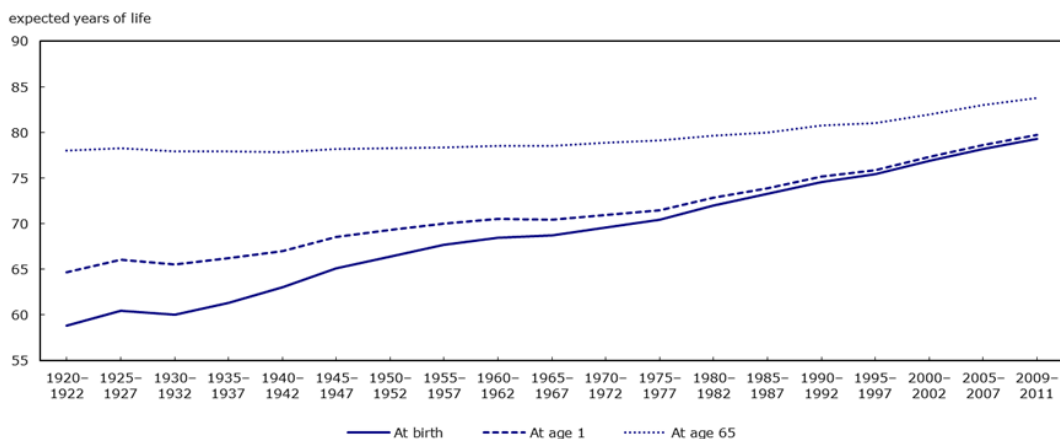
Sources: Nagunar, *Longevity and historical life tables, 1920–1922 to 1965–1967*.
Statistics Canada, *Report on the demographic situation in Canada, 2001, 1970–1972 to 1990–1992*.
Statistics Canada, *Life tables, Canada, provinces and territories, 1995–1997 to 2009–2011*.

Life expectancy of one-year-olds

The large gains that Canadians experienced in life expectancy at birth were accompanied by smaller gains in life expectancy at other ages.

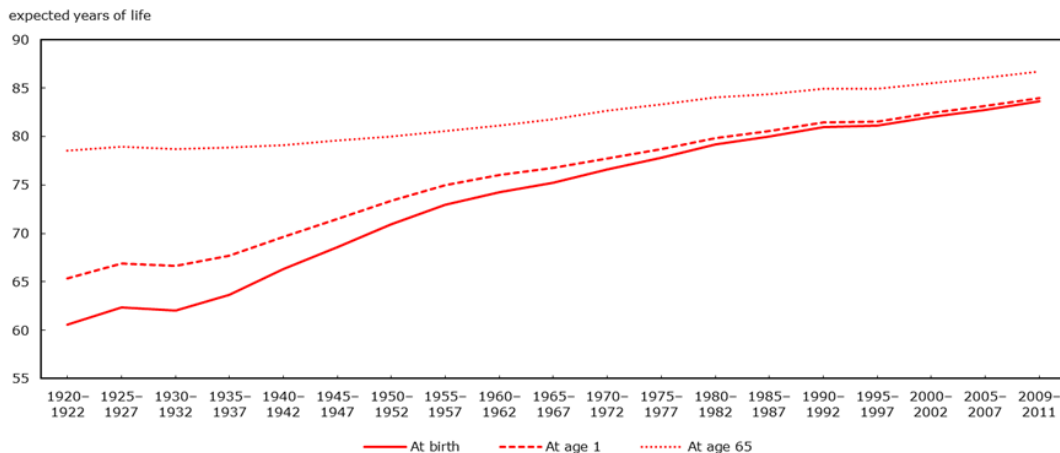
In 1920–1922, one-year-old boys were expected to live until age 64.7 and one-year-old girls until age 65.3. This was higher than life expectancy at birth by 5.8 years for men and 4.7 years for women. This difference decreased to less than half a year by 2009–2011 as a result of the large reduction in infant mortality. Overall, from 1920–1922 to 2009–2011, the life expectancy of one-year old boys increased by 15.0 years and the life expectancy of one-year-old girls increased by 18.6 years.

Chart 2
Total number of expected years of life for Canadian men—at birth, age 1, and age 65, 1920–1922 to 2009–2011



Note: The total number of expected years of life is the sum of the age reached and life expectancy for that age.
Sources: Nagunur, *Longevity and historical life tables, 1920–1922 to 1965–1967*.
Statistics Canada, *Report on the demographic situation in Canada, 2001, 1970–1972 to 1990–1992*.
Statistics Canada, *Life tables, Canada, provinces and territories, 1995–1997 to 2009–2011*.

Chart 3
Total number of expected years of life for Canadian women—at birth, age 1, and age 65, 1920–1922 to 2009–2011



Note: The total number of expected years of life is the sum of the age reached and life expectancy for that age.
Sources: Nagunur, *Longevity and historical life tables, 1920–1922 to 1965–1967*.
Statistics Canada, *Report on the demographic situation in Canada, 2001, 1970–1972 to 1990–1992*.
Statistics Canada, *Life tables, Canada, provinces and territories, 1995–1997 to 2009–2011*.

Life expectancy of 65-year-olds

In 1920–1922, Canadian men who had lived to age 65 could expect to live for 13 more years, and women could expect to live for 13.5 more years (to age 78.0 and 78.5 respectively). The expected total life span of 65-year-olds was substantially higher than life expectancy at birth: 19.2 years higher for men and 18.0 years higher for women.

In 2009–2011, 65-year-old men were expected to live until they were 83.8, while 65-year-old women were expected to live until the age of 86.7. This means that from 1920–1922 to 2009–2011, the life expectancies of 65-year-olds increased by 5.8 years for men and 8.2 years for women. This is a much smaller gain than the 20-year increase in life expectancy for newborns during this same period.

Gains in life expectancy

Most of the gains in life expectancy from 1920–1922 to 2009–2011 were attributable to the prevention of death among younger people. For example, childhood immunization against infectious diseases helped to reduce death at early ages. Health awareness campaigns and associated legislation aimed at preventing injury, such as mandatory seat-belt use, also helped to prevent deaths across a broad age range.

People aged 65 and older have experienced modest gains in life expectancy, in part because of advancements in the prevention and treatment of circulatory diseases and, more recently, the treatment of cancer.

Definitions

Life expectancy: Average number of years an individual could be expected to live, based on current patterns of mortality. This indicator reflects environmental conditions in a country, the health of its people, the quality of care they receive when they are sick, and their living conditions.

Expected years of life: Sum of the age reached and the life expectancy for that age.

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