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2026 Census Content Fact Sheets

Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Income and expenditures, housing and homelessness

2026 Census of Population

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Introduction

The next Census of Population will take place in May 2026. To maintain the relevance of the census, Statistics Canada evaluates and reviews the questionnaire content in preparation for each census cycle. This includes several stages of consultative engagement, as well as testing and data evaluation, to recommend questionnaire content for the census.

Approximately 222,000 households from communities across the country were selected to participate in the 2024 Census Test. The test helped to determine whether new or modified questions under consideration could be easily understood and answered by Canadians. Testing census content ensures that high-quality data will be available from the 2026 Census of Population to support a wide variety of programs and services in communities across the country.

A series of fact sheets provides an overview of the content changes for the 2026 Census of Population because the census process is always evolving to reflect changes in the Canadian population and its demographic characteristics.

This fact sheet offers a summary of content changes for the 2026 Census specific to the following topics: income and expenditures, and housing and homelessness. The tested changes for each topic are explained below, along with the resulting approach for 2026.



Income and expenditures

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The question was modified to collect information on use of child care with and without costs, shifting the focus of the child care question from paid child care to any kind of regular child care used. The question was modified to allow child care data to be analyzed with individual characteristics—information on child care is collected for each child in a household, rather than collectively for all children within the household. The question instructions were updated with examples to provide clarity on what is considered child care and what types of care arrangements are to be included in the questionnaire or excluded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The questionnaire will now ask respondents to report on regular child care use for each child living in a household. Those who use regular child care will be further prompted to enter the amount paid for the child care arrangement or to indicate that the child received care at no cost. The question instructions now include examples of the types of child care arrangements to be included and excluded, which will guide respondents toward the child care concept relevant for policy making.

Why are these questions asked?

Census income and earnings data serve to monitor the economic well-being of individuals, families and households. Different levels of government use these data to study the use and impact of income support programs. Businesses use income data with other sociodemographic statistics to find locations for new stores and develop new products and services. Private and public sector researchers use information about earnings to study labour markets and industry patterns. These data also provide information at low levels of geography on subpopulations and particularly vulnerable groups, such as low-income families, Indigenous people (including the on-reserve First Nations population), racialized groups and immigrants.

The questions on child care expenses and child or spousal support payments are used to derive disposable income to measure poverty in Canada. The information from these questions is also used to better understand the use of child care and the role of support payments in Canadian society.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

To ensure that the census measures important trends in society and produces relevant, high-quality data, the 2026 Census will continue to use administrative files to produce data for detailed income sources, such as employment income and benefits from various government programs. These statistics, among others, are central to policy making, policy assessments, and labour market and economic well-being analyses.

Income data are also essential for tracking the progress of poverty reduction. In August 2018, the Government of Canada announced the Poverty Reduction Strategy and made the Market Basket Measure (MBM) Canada's official measure of poverty. Having the child care and support payments expenditure questions on the census long-form questionnaire enables MBM statistics to be reported in great geographic detail every five years.

Child care has become a critical social policy topic in Canada in recent years. In 2021, \$30 billion was announced by the federal government to support the implementation of a national child care system. The *Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act* (Bill C-35) set March 2026 as the target for the full implementation of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system.



For the 2026 Census, Statistics Canada has modified the child care question to capture regular child care use and costs for every child aged 13 and under on Census Day. This change will better meet the data needs of experts in the early learning and child care research community. The data collected will help support the mandates of the [Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act](#) (Bill C-35), the federal government’s [Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#), and the [Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework](#).

The changes to the child care content were developed with the goals of enhancing the relevance of the child care data while preserving the historical comparability of the poverty estimates. Results have been analyzed and discussed with stakeholders from Employment and Social Development Canada to ensure standards on data relevance, data quality, coverage and comparability over time are met.

Housing and homelessness

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two new questions were added to collect information on people in dwellings who are experiencing or have recently experienced homelessness. The question identifying dwellings on an agricultural operation was removed, along with the instructions to skip the shelter cost questions. Help text was added to the question on yearly payments for water and other municipal services to clarify the reporting of shelter costs associated with municipal services included in property taxes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The long-form questionnaire includes two new questions on homelessness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first question captures whether people have experienced sheltered or unsheltered homelessness over the past 12 months. The second question captures whether people are experiencing on Census Day or have experienced over the past 12 months homelessness in the form of living with friends, family or others because they had nowhere else to live. The question identifying dwellings on an agricultural operation and the instructions to skip the shelter cost questions have been removed. The shelter cost question on water and other municipal services will continue to be collected as in the 2021 Census to preserve historical comparability.

Why are these questions asked?

The housing questions provide information on the housing stock in Canada. In addition, data on the number of rooms and bedrooms in homes and on housing costs are used to assess the economic situation of families. Governments use this information to measure levels of crowding in dwellings and develop housing programs. Information on the age of dwellings and the need for repairs is used by municipalities to develop neighbourhood improvement programs.

Two new questions on whether individuals living in private dwellings are experiencing homelessness or have experienced homelessness over the past 12 months provide information on people who are among those with the greatest housing need. This information is used by organizations and governments to support communities in addressing homelessness.



Existing data sources on homelessness include Point-in-Time counts and administrative data from shelters, which provide a snapshot of homelessness in transitional housing, shelters and unsheltered locations. People in dwellings who have recently experienced homelessness or people who are experiencing homelessness while living temporarily with family, friends or others represent a significant data gap for measuring homelessness. The two new questions will fill this important data gap. While these questions will not be collected for people in shelters or unsheltered locations, the new information from the census will complement other data sources to provide a more comprehensive picture of homelessness in Canada.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

To ensure that the census measures important trends in society and produces relevant, high-quality data, the 2026 Census will continue to track key housing indicators such as homeownership rates and housing affordability to provide updates on the housing needs of Canadians. Access to homeownership and rising rents are of high importance to Canadian households, and the continuity of the housing content in the census will allow governments, businesses and Canadians to see how their local neighbourhoods have evolved over time.

Further to consultation and extensive testing, Statistics Canada has added two new questions to the 2026 Census questionnaire to measure people in private dwellings who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness over the past 12 months. The first question captures homelessness experiences in shelters, on the street or in parks, in makeshift shelters, in vehicles, or in abandoned buildings. The second question captures people who are experiencing on Census Day or have experienced over the past 12 months homelessness in the form of living temporarily with friends, family or others because they had nowhere else to live. With the addition of the homelessness measures in private dwellings, complementing other data sources on sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, more comprehensive national homelessness research can be conducted.

The collection of shelter costs has also been expanded to include households in dwellings located on an agricultural operation that is operated by a household member. With this expansion, shelter costs are now collected for all households across Canada, and nationwide housing affordability research can be conducted. This expansion also helps reduce response burden on Canadians as it is no longer necessary to include a question asking Canadians whether their dwelling is located on an agricultural operation. Historically comparable housing affordability research that does not include households in dwellings located on an agricultural operation will be possible. Statistics Canada will use administrative data and the information already collected about the place of work to classify households in dwellings located on an agricultural operation.

The changes to the housing content and the addition of the homelessness questions for the 2026 Census cycle were carefully analyzed and discussed with stakeholders. These modifications were guided by expert advice to preserve data relevance, overall quality, coverage and comparability over time, as well as to ensure that legislative and policy requirements continue to be met. Specifically, to identify the importance of collecting and disseminating these data for on-reserve communities, Statistics Canada consulted with experts from Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada; the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; and the Federal Housing Advocate.

For more information on the new questions related to homelessness experiences, please consult the [“Report on content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Homelessness.”](#)