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2026 Census Content Fact Sheets

Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Canadian military experience

2026 Census of Population

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Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Canadian military experience

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 question on Canadian military experience. The tested changes are explained below, along with the resulting approach for 2026.



Canadian military experience

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The placement of the question was changed from the short-form census questionnaire to the long-form questionnaire. Moderate changes to the wording and format of the question were made to improve clarity by removing the exclusion criteria for the Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service (COATS) and the Canadian Rangers and to increase the scope of the question. Additional response categories on the type of military service were included to distinguish between service in the Regular Force and the Reserve Force. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Canadian military experience question is now on the long-form census questionnaire to reduce response burden on the short-form questionnaire. An additional follow-up question about the type of service has been added for people who answer “yes” to the question about military service. It includes three response categories: “Regular Force,” “Reserve Force” and “other type of service.” The final category has a write-in component. The terminology in the section title and original question responses was changed to be more general (e.g., “Canadian military”) and bold font was used in the response categories for clarity. The on-screen help text now states “Do not include service as a Cadet (youth program)” below the question. All other inclusion and exclusion criteria have been removed. Therefore, the Canadian Rangers and Cadet Organizations Administration and Training Service (COATS) are now included for the currently and previously serving populations.

Why is this question asked?

The question on Canadian military experience is used to determine the number of Canadians who have previously served or are currently serving as members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) at the time of the census. The data from this question are used to help better serve this population by informing various policies and programs administered by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), the Department of National Defence (DND) and other Veteran support organizations. Data sources that currently exist include the 2021 Census; historical census records from 1951, 1961 and 1971; and a variety of partial administrative data. A question on Canadian military experience is included on the census, which will provide an estimate of the number of CAF members and Veterans living in Canada and provide insights about their sociodemographic characteristics.

Current trends and data gaps for this topic

To ensure that the census measures important trends in society and continues to produce relevant, high-quality data, content changes were considered for the 2026 Census. Recently, there has been an increased focus on programs and services to improve the mental and physical health and well-being of Canadian Veterans, with an emphasis on the quality of their transition from military to civilian life and its impact on their family life. Census data allow for analysis on various characteristics of the currently serving and Veteran populations, including their family characteristics. The Veteran population has unique needs, having been identified as a vulnerable subpopulation in the federal government’s National Housing Strategy. Statistics Canada has responded by working closely with VAC, DND and other stakeholders to look at Canadian Veterans’ overall health and well-being.



Any changes made to census content are carefully analyzed and discussed with stakeholders and 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. Expert advisors on the Canadian military experience census initiative include researchers from VAC, the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research, and DND. During consultations with stakeholders, the importance of being able to distinguish between service in the Regular Force and the Reserve Force was highlighted.

Following the addition of the Canadian military experience question on the 2021 Census, testing showed some respondents were confused with the military terminology and about what type of service should be included or excluded. Consultations indicated a need for more detailed information on the type of military service (Regular Force or Reserve Force). As a result, for the 2026 Census, Statistics Canada considered some changes to this question.