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2026 Census Content Fact Sheets

Content changes for the 2026 Census of Population: Activities of daily living

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 questions on activities of daily living. The tested changes are explained below, along with the resulting approach for 2026.



Activities of daily living

Changes evaluated in the 2024 Census Test	Resulting approach for the 2026 Census of Population
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor modifications were made to the wording of the questions, to the accompanying instructions and to the formatting of the questions. Alternative terminology was implemented to address concerns raised regarding the use of “substance abuse” as an example in part e) of the question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor changes to the formatting of the question were introduced in the paper questionnaire and additional instructions are now included in the electronic questionnaire to increase the accessibility of the questionnaires. The term “substance use disorder” now replaces “substance abuse” as an example in part e) of the question. This new term is now more commonly used by clinicians, the federal government, and organizations concerned with addiction and mental health.

Why are these questions asked?

The questions on activities of daily living provide information about people in Canada who may have a long-term condition or difficulty. The questions on activities of daily living are a first step in identifying people who may have a disability and who could then be selected to participate in a follow-up survey on people with disabilities, the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD).

Because the census is the only large-scale source for these data, information from the questions on activities of daily living is essential for conducting the CSD. The information from the CSD is used to support policy and program development by governments and organizations. People with disabilities are one of the four designated employment equity groups under the *Employment Equity Act*. Additionally, the purpose of the *Accessible Canada Act* is to make Canada barrier-free by 2040 for everyone, particularly those with disabilities.

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 proposed for the 2026 Census. During consultations with data users, it was noted that information on activities of daily living has become increasingly important, particularly in light of Canada’s aging population.

The current census questions were introduced in 2016 to create a more inclusive measurement strategy for a wide range of disabilities.

For the 2026 Census, Statistics Canada considered minor changes to the wording and format of the questions on activities of daily living, including new instructional text in the electronic questionnaire and an update to one of the examples based on consultations and results from testing.

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. Statistics Canada works closely with external stakeholders, such as Employment and Social Development Canada, to develop census content.