

Insights on Canadian Society

Making plans for the future: Canadians' intentions to have biological children

by Victoria Jordan and Maire Sinha

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INSIGHTS ON CANADIAN SOCIETY



Making plans for the future: Canadians' intentions to have biological children

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Overview of the study

Using data collected from the Canadian Social Survey in 2021 and 2024, this study explores whether there have been any changes in Canadians' future plans to have children. It examines overall changes in these plans among Canadians aged 15 to 49, as well as shifts in the number of intended children. To understand the drivers of change, the study looks at differences across sociodemographic groups.

- When looking at intentions to have biological children (excluding any current biological children), a greater share of Canadians in 2024 than in 2021 said that they wanted one or more children at some point in the future (46% versus 41%, respectively).
- In 2024, over half of Canadians without biological children planned to have children (58%), while one-quarter (25%) of those who already had biological children planned to have one or more additional children.
- The largest increase in intentions was recorded among Canadians aged 15 to 24; in 2024, nearly two-thirds (64%) of them said they wanted at least one, or another, child—an increase from 53% in 2021. In 2024, these young Canadians also intended to have the greatest number of children (2.4 children), compared with 25- to 34-year-olds (2.0 children) and 35- to 49-year-olds (1.6 children).
- Never-married Canadians who are not in a common-law relationship recorded a significant increase in their plans to expand their families by having biological children, compared with no change among married Canadians and those currently in a common-law relationship. Specifically, in 2024, 56% of never-married Canadians intended to have children—an increase of 9 percentage points from 2021 (47%).

SPECIAL EDITION ISSUE OF INSIGHTS ON CANADIAN SOCIETY

The special edition issue of *Insights on Canadian Society* expands Statistics Canada's flagship social publication to offer policy-relevant articles united across a common theme, leveraging visuals and accessible multimedia formats. This issue focuses on changes in Canadian society over time, shedding light on where Canada has been—and where it is heading. This article is featured within this issue.

Introduction

In recent years, Canada's total fertility rate has been decreasing, reaching a record low of 1.25 children per woman in 2024,¹ meeting the criteria of an "ultra-low" fertility country. This status generally means that a country may face population aging challenges, including strains on the labour force and pressures on the public health care and pension systems.²

Fertility patterns, including both the number of children born and the average age of childbearing, have shifted over the last six decades. At a national level, women have been delaying their childbearing from their 20s to their 30s.³ Specifically, this trend of increasingly older average childbearing ages could result in a growing number of Canadians facing age-related infertility, and therefore being unable to achieve their intended family size.⁴ Indeed, fertility intentions do not necessarily correspond to future fertility rates, as not every pregnancy is planned and not every planned pregnancy will be realized. Yet, previous research has shown that there is a close correlation between intentions and realization at the larger population level.⁵

Previous studies have suggested that plans for fertility are adjusted in the face of economic uncertainty.⁶ In Canada, the last five years have been marked by a mix of economic and social disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic,⁷ a rise in concerns about housing affordability,⁸ a general increase in the cost of living,⁹ an increase in unemployment among youth,¹⁰ and potential labour market shifts with the expansion of artificial intelligence and automation.¹¹ In light of these broad socioeconomic shifts, it is important to understand whether people's plans around family building have changed over the last few years. Equally important is determining whether specific groups in Canada, such as young Canadians, have been more likely to alter their plans.

This article uses the Canadian Social Survey (CSS) to explore changes in intentions to have biological children among Canadians aged 15 to 49, looking at shifts from 2021 to 2024. To understand the drivers of change, the study examines differences across sociodemographic groups. For this study, the focus is on intentions to have biological children at some point in the future and excludes any current biological children. This differs from the traditional concept of

fertility intentions, often known as lifetime fertility intentions, which considers all intended children, including any existing biological children.

More Canadians planning to have children in the future

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, there were indications that some people aged 15 to 49 were reflecting on their fertility plans in the face of economic uncertainty, public health measures, and broader issues relating to social connections and relationships. According to the 2021 CSS, 19% of people in that age range said that because of the pandemic, they were going to delay having children or intended to have fewer children.¹²

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In 2021, 41% of Canadians wanted biological children at some point in the future. Three years later, this percentage rose to 46%.

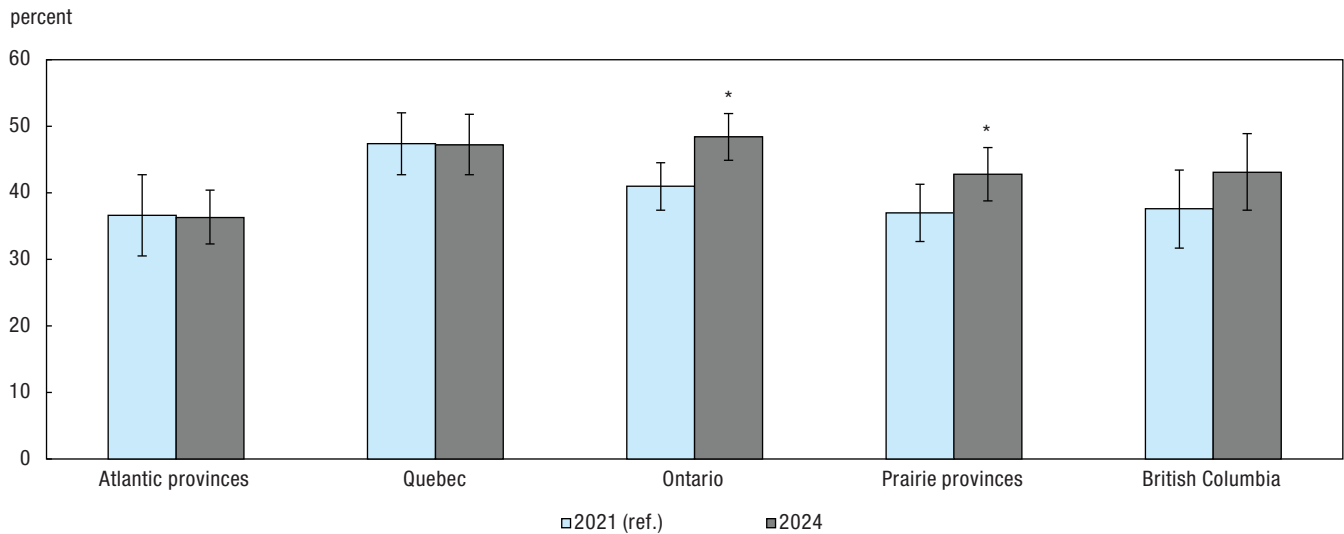
At that time, in 2021, 41% of Canadians aged 15 to 49 said that they intended to have children for the first time or to have additional biological children (beyond any current children). Three years later, this percentage rose to 46%, suggesting that a growing share of Canadians aged 15 to 49 wanted children in the post-pandemic period. The number of planned children also increased from 2.0 children in 2021 to 2.1 children in 2024.

Ontario saw the largest increase in the percentage of people intending to have children at some point in the future

There were differences in plans to have children across regions. In 2021, Quebec held the top position across Canada—with the greatest proportion of people wanting children compared with all other regions (Chart 1). By 2024, the share of people in Quebec wanting children remained high (47%), but people in Ontario joined them in the top spot (48%).

Chart 1

Plans to have biological children in the future among Canadians aged 15 to 49, by region, 2021 and 2024



* significantly different from reference year (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: "Plans to have biological children in the future" refers to a desire to have any children or additional children, excluding any current biological children. Provincial groupings are based on the Standard Geographical Classification 2021 and were required because of the sample size. The Atlantic provinces include Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, while the Prairie provinces include Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey, 2021 and 2024.

The proportion of Ontarians wanting children in the future stood at 41% in 2021. With the exception of Ontario and the Prairie provinces, most regions saw no change in the proportion of people wanting children.

As for the number of intended children, there were no statistically significant differences across regions, at 2.0 intended children in 2021 and 2.1 intended children in 2024. The one exception was British Columbia, which had a slightly lower average number of intended children in 2024, at 1.9 intended children.

Over half of Canadians without children planned to have children

While families can also be grown through marriage and adoption, the share of people without biological children who wanted children was higher in 2024

(58%) than in 2021 (52%). By contrast, there was no significant change in the share of those with biological children who wanted additional children (25% in 2021 and 26% in 2024) (Table 1).

“On average, Canadians without children reported that they wanted about 2.2 kids.

On average, Canadians without children reported that they wanted about 2.2 children. Not unexpectedly, this number is significantly higher than the intended number of additional children (1.5 children) for those who already had biological children.

Table 1

Plans to have biological children in the future among Canadians aged 15 to 49, by sociodemographic characteristics, 2021 and 2024

Sociodemographic characteristics	2021 (ref.)			2024		
	95% confidence interval			95% confidence interval		
	Proportion	Lower limit	Upper limit	Proportion	Lower limit	Upper limit
	percent					
Total	40.9	38.9	42.9	45.6[†]	43.4	47.7
Gender						
Men+ (ref.)	44.6	41.6	47.5	48.6	45.5	51.8
Women+	37.0	34.2	39.7	42.3* [†]	39.3	45.3
Age group						
15 to 24 years (ref.)	52.9	47.9	58.1	64.0 [†]	59.4	68.7
25 to 34 years	55.0	51.4	58.7	59.4	55.2	63.5
35 to 49 years	21.6*	19.5	23.8	21.9*	19.4	24.4
Marital status						
Married or living common law (ref.)	36.8	34.4	39.1	38.1	35.2	41.0
Never married	47.5*	43.9	51.2	55.6* [†]	52.1	59.0
Separated, divorced or widowed	21.2*	13.3	29.1	25.6*	15.7	35.5
Has biological children						
Yes (ref.)	25.3	22.8	27.7	25.5	22.5	28.4
No	51.7*	48.7	54.7	58.1* [†]	55.1	61.0
2SLGBTQ+ status						
Non-2SLGBTQ+ people (ref.)	41.7	39.5	43.8	46.9 [†]	44.7	49.1
2SLGBTQ+ people	34.1	27.3	41.0	32.8*	25.6	40.0

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

[†] significantly different from reference year (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: "Plans to have biological children in the future" refers to a desire to have any children or additional children, excluding any current biological children. The men+ category includes men (and boys), as well as some non-binary people, while the women+ category includes women (and girls), as well as some non-binary people.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey, 2021 and 2024.

Young Canadians aged 15 to 24 saw the largest increase in intentions to expand their family through childbearing

Although young people may be most affected by recent economic shifts,¹³ they are leading the increase in future plans to have biological children. In 2021, just over half (53%) of Canadians aged 15 to 24 reported that they intended to either have a child for the first time or have additional children. This figure increased by more than 10 percentage points to 64% in 2024 (Table 1).

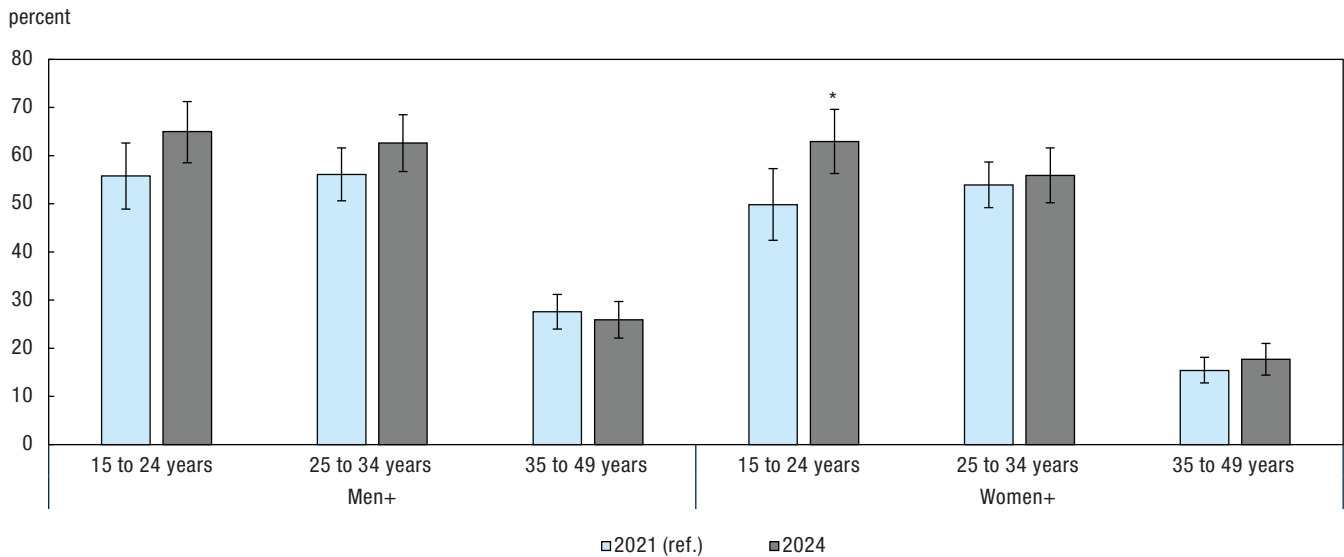
The rise in the share of young people wanting children was exclusively due to an increase among young women (from 50% in 2021 to 63% in 2024), as there

was no significant change in the proportion of young men wanting children (Chart 2). However, young men in 2021 and 2024 were more likely than young women to indicate that they wanted to expand their family.

Canadians aged 15 to 24 who reported that they plan to have children also intended to have the most children of any age group, at 2.4 intended children in 2024 (Table 2). In 2024, those aged 25 to 34 who intended to have children wanted 2.0 children, and those aged 35 to 49 planned to have an average of 1.6 children. This may be explained by differences in the likelihood of currently having children. Canadians aged 15 to 24 are the least likely to currently have children, and this could explain why their intended number of children is higher than that of Canadians aged 35 to 49, who are more likely to already have biological children.

Chart 2

Plans to have biological children in the future among Canadians aged 15 to 49, by gender, 2021 and 2024



* significantly different from reference year (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: "Plans to have biological children in the future" refers to a desire to have any children or additional children, excluding any current biological children. The men+ category includes men (and boys), as well as some non-binary people, while the women+ category includes women (and girls), as well as some non-binary people. Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey, 2021 and 2024.

Never-married Canadians who are not in a common-law relationship saw a significant increase in fertility intentions

Never-married Canadians who are not in a common-law relationship—more than half¹⁴ of whom are younger than 25—represented the only marital status group to see an increase in intentions to have children at some point in the future. Their proportion rose from 48% in 2021 to 56% in 2024.

In addition, never-married people were consistently more likely than people in a married or common-law relationship to either want children for the first time or have additional children (Table 1).

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Never-married people were consistently more likely than people in a married or common-law relationship to either want children for the first time or have additional children.

This was seen in 2021 and 2024, and it remained true even after controlling for age, gender and the number of current children. Never-married Canadians also planned to have more children than their married counterparts (2.3 versus 1.8 children, respectively, in 2024), though this may reflect their higher likelihood of not currently having children.

For married and common-law coupled Canadians, the intention to expand a family remained relatively stable from 2021 (37%) to 2024 (38%).

Table 2

Number of intended children among Canadians aged 15 to 49 who plan to have biological children in the future, by sociodemographic characteristics, 2021 and 2024

Sociodemographic characteristics	2021 (ref.)			2024		
	Number of intended children	95% confidence interval		Number of intended children	95% confidence interval	
		Lower limit	Upper limit		Lower limit	Upper limit
	number	percent		number	percent	
Total	2.0	1.9	2.0	2.1[†]	2.0	2.1
Gender						
Men+ (ref.)	2.0	1.9	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.2
Women+	2.0	1.9	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.2
Age group						
15 to 24 years (ref.)	2.3	2.1	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.5
25 to 34 years	1.9*	1.8	2.0	2.0*	1.9	2.1
35 to 49 years	1.6*	1.5	1.7	1.6*	1.5	1.7
Marital status						
Married or living common law (ref.)	1.7	1.6	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.9
Never married	2.2*	2.1	2.3	2.3*	2.2	2.4
Separated, divorced or widowed	F	F	F	F	F	F
Has biological children						
Yes (ref.)	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.7
No	2.2*	2.1	2.3	2.2*	2.2	2.3
2SLGBTQ+ status						
Non-2SLGBTQ+ people (ref.)	1.9	1.9	2.0	2.1 [†]	2.0	2.1
2SLGBTQ+ people	2.5 ^E	1.9	3.0	2.2 ^E	1.9	2.5

^E use with caution

^F too unreliable to be published

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

[†] significantly different from reference year (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: "Number of intended children" refers to the desired number of children, excluding any current biological children. The men+ category includes men (and boys), as well as some non-binary people, while the women+ category includes women (and girls), as well as some non-binary people.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey, 2021 and 2024.

No change in fertility plans among 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians

Overall, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals¹⁵ in Canada saw no change from 2021 to 2024 in their intentions to expand their family, with around one-third (34%) saying they wanted to have children in the future. This contrasts with the situation of non-2SLGBTQ+ individuals, among whom the percentage of those with intentions to have future children rose from 42% in 2021 to 47% in 2024. In addition, the number of intended children rose among non-2SLGBTQ+ people, from 1.9 children in 2021 to 2.1 children in 2024. There was no significant change in the intended number of children among 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians, which stood at around 2.2 children in 2024.

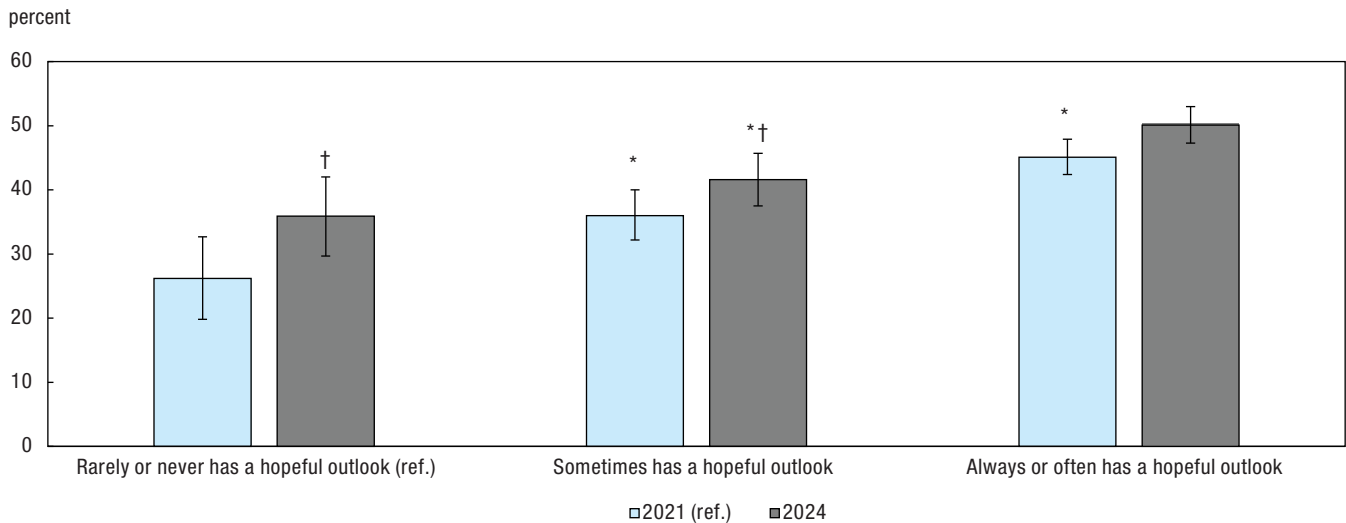
Hopefulness tied to future plans to have children

Having a positive future outlook is linked to a higher likelihood of wanting biological children. In 2024, half (50%) of people who always or often had a hopeful outlook wanted children in the future, compared with 36% of people who rarely or never had a hopeful outlook on life.

While having a positive outlook was consistently connected with increased intentions to have biological children, the overall trend of wanting children in the future was seen for both those with a positive outlook and those who rarely or never had a hopeful outlook. Specifically, there was a 5-percentage-point increase in plans to have children among Canadians who had a hopeful outlook (from 45% in 2021 to 50% in 2024), along with a 10-percentage-point increase among Canadians who lacked this same level of hope (from 26% in 2021 to 36% in 2024) (Chart 3).

Chart 3

Plans to have biological children in the future among Canadians aged 15 to 49, by future outlook, 2021 and 2024



* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

† significantly different from reference year (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: "Plans to have biological children in the future" refers to a desire to have any children or additional children, excluding any current biological children. Error bars represent the 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Survey, 2021 and 2024.

Conclusion

Data from the CSS provide timely insight into how Canadians feel about having children. A growing proportion are thinking about including children in their future plans. Leading this upward change from 2021 to 2024 were Canadians without any current biological children, residents of Ontario and the Prairie provinces, women aged 15 to 24, and never-married Canadians.

This uptick warrants ongoing monitoring to determine whether it signals the start of an upward trend in plans to have children, and whether any increases in intentions among young people correspond to

future increases in realized fertility. Previous research has suggested that the fertility gap between fertility intentions and achieved fertility may be widening¹⁶ and may be particularly pronounced among younger people. Younger cohorts of people may not realize their earlier stated fertility intentions (for several social and economic reasons) or simply shift their preferences as they age.¹⁷ With continued monitoring and more in-depth exploration, greater insight will be gleaned on future trends in fertility—an issue that impacts all social institutions, from daycare and school planning to health care and pension systems.

Victoria Jordan is an analyst and **Maire Sinha** is a senior analyst with the Centre for Social Data Development and Insights at Statistics Canada.

Data sources, methods and limitations

The [Canadian Social Survey \(CSS\)](#) is a quarterly survey conducted by Statistics Canada every three months for a period of six weeks. It collects data on a variety of social topics, such as health, well-being and quality of life. The goal of the CSS is to understand social issues more rapidly than traditional surveys, and the CSS is part of Statistics Canada's larger effort to modernize data collection methods and activities. The CSS provides data at the national level, excluding the territories. The target population of the CSS is non-institutionalized individuals aged 15 or older living off reserve in the 10 provinces of Canada.

This study used data from two cycles of the CSS. The third cycle of the CSS, "[Canadian Social Survey – Well-being, Unpaid Work and Family Time](#)," was collected from October 26 to December 7, 2021. The project also used data from the 15th cycle of the CSS, "[Canadian Social Survey – Quality of Life, Housing and Trust](#)," which was collected from October 18 to December 2, 2024. The sample size for each of these two cycles of the CSS was

20,000 households stratified by province and expected number of household members aged 15 or older. In each of the 20,000 households, one member of the household was then randomly selected to complete the CSS. The third cycle had an estimated response rate of 58.4% (9,951 respondents) and the 15th cycle had an estimated response rate of 46.8% (8,491 respondents).

The study focused on those aged 15 to 49 who answered the survey questions on the number of biological children and the number of intended children. Consistency edits to the data were necessary. When the value of the intended number of children was lower than the number of current children, these responses were coded as non-responses. This is because the question on fertility intentions instructed respondents to include current children in their response. This study excluded existing children to examine future plans to have children, rather than lifetime plans.

The term "**Canadians**" refers to all people living in Canada, regardless of citizenship status.

Notes

1. Statistics Canada, 2025a.
2. Statistics Canada, 2023.
3. Statistics Canada, 2024; Provencher and Galbraith, 2024.
4. Statistics Canada, 2025a.
5. Ajzen and Klobas, 2013.
6. Fostik and Galbraith, 2021; Novelli et al., 2022.
7. On the social side, dating and intimate relationships faced physical and social barriers that had not been previously seen, notably affecting those not living with a partner (Yarger et al., 2021). On the economic side, the pandemic was marked by higher consumer prices, along with increases in housing prices and affordability—all factors associated with the fertility plans of young people (Atalay et al., 2021; Clark and Ferrer, 2019).
8. Statistics Canada, 2024a.
9. Statistics Canada, 2024b.
10. Statistics Canada, 2025b.
11. Mehdi and Frenette, 2024.
12. Fostik and Galbraith, 2021.
13. Statistics Canada, 2025b.
14. In 2024, 56% of never-married people were younger than 25, according to the CSS.
15. 2SLGBTQ+ refers to people who are Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, or who use other terms related to gender and sexual diversity.
16. Shreffler, 2024.
17. Guzzo and Hayford, 2023.

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