

From: ["Levitt, Karen" <karen.levitt@vancouver.ca>](mailto:karen.levitt@vancouver.ca)  
To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)  
Date: 8/5/2022 1:27:54 PM  
Subject: City of Vancouver 2021 Census – Household, families, and income

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Dear Mayor and Council,

Attached please find the third memo in a series of memos based on May 2021 Census of Population, providing further analysis of the initial datasets released by Statistics Canada throughout 2022.

Specifically, this memo focuses on household, families, and income data specific to the City of Vancouver, with comparisons to the region and other large Canadian municipalities.

Council previously received related memos on February 28, 2022 ([population and dwelling counts](#)) and May 10, 2022 ([age, sex at birth, gender, and type of dwelling](#)).

Highlights of 2021 Census □Households, Families, and Income:

- Family households, including couples with and without children and multigenerational households, continue to make up the majority of households in Vancouver (53%), while one-person households were 39%. Roommate households and couples without children were the fastest-growing household type between 2016 and 2021.
- Income in Vancouver increased much faster than inflation, both before and during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Income support programs reduced inequity and decreased low-income rates in 2020, but many of these programs have ended.
- Compared to other cities, Vancouver has a high incidence of low-income and an inequitable income distribution. Population and household growth are skewed toward higher incomes, while many people in Vancouver continue to experience very low incomes, poverty, and homelessness

Please feel free to direct any further questions related to this memo to Branislav Henselmann, A/General Manager, ACCS, or Theresa O'Donnell, General Manager, PDS, and they will make sure to provide the answers in the weekly Q&A roundup.

Thanks,

Karen

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**Karen Levitt**, Deputy City Manager (she/her)  
**[karen.levitt@vancouver.ca](mailto:karen.levitt@vancouver.ca) telephone (**

The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm/Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh/Squamish and səliłwətaʔ/Tsleil-Waututh nations

## MEMORANDUM

August 5, 2022

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager  
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager  
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager  
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk  
Lynda Graves, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office  
Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC  
Anita Zaenker, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Neil Monckton, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Alvin Singh, Communications Director, Mayor's Office  
Aftab Erfan, Chief Equity Officer  
Mary Clare Zak, Managing Director, Social Policy and Projects, ACCS  
Dan Garrison, Assistant Director, Housing Policy and Regulation, PDS  
Chris Robertson, Assistant Director, City-wide and Regional Planning, PDS

FROM: Branislav Henselmann, Acting General Manager, ACCS  
Theresa O'Donnell, General Manager, PDS

SUBJECT: City of Vancouver 2021 Census – Household, families, and income

RTS #: N/A

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## PURPOSE

The 2021 Census of Population took place in May 2021, and Statistics Canada is releasing initial datasets throughout 2022. Council previously received memos on February 28, 2022 ([population and dwelling counts](#)) and May 10, 2022 ([age, sex at birth, gender, and type of dwelling](#)). This third memo focuses on household, families, and income data specific to the City of Vancouver, with comparisons to the region and other large cities in Canada. This release shows ongoing trends related to household and family configurations and an inequitable distribution of income. It also shows strong evidence that the interventions made by governments to provide widespread income supports during the early response to the COVID-19 pandemic made a significant impact by increasing people's incomes and reducing income inequity. However, many of these interventions were temporary, and longer-term trends are not yet clear. People in the lowest income and most precariously housed situations are not included in census data, and too many people in Vancouver continue to experience poverty.

## DISCUSSION

### Highlights: 2021 Census – Households, families, and income

- Family households, including couples with and without children and multigenerational households, continue to make up the majority of households in Vancouver (53%), while one-person households were 39%. Roommate households and couples without children were the fastest-growing household type between 2016 and 2021.
- Income in Vancouver increased much faster than inflation, both before and during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Income support programs reduced inequity and decreased low-income rates in 2020, but many of these programs have ended.
- Compared to other cities, Vancouver has a high incidence of low-income and an inequitable income distribution. Population and household growth are skewed toward higher incomes, while many people in Vancouver continue to experience very low incomes, poverty, and homelessness.

### Households and families

Statistics Canada defines a household as “a person or group of persons who occupy the same dwelling and do not have a usual place of residence elsewhere in Canada or abroad.” A household may consist of a family group such as a census family, two or more families sharing a dwelling, a group of unrelated persons, or a person living alone.

Historically, Statistics Canada’s definition of a census family has been based on the traditional nuclear family, which meant the census did not always capture the diversity of family arrangements among Canadians. In May 2021, Statistics Canada updated this definition, and new categories of household types were introduced to better reflect some of these nuances.<sup>1</sup> However, the data still only reflects families defined by cohabitation.

The census also provides data on economic families, defined as a “group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law union, adoption or a foster relationship.” However, the current data release provides limited information on economic families at the city level, with additional details at the regional level only. Further census data releases and custom tabulations will be needed to analyze the current situation and trends of households and families in Vancouver.

### *Household types*

The breakdown of household types in Vancouver has been relatively stable over the past two decades, with family households (shown in blue in Figure 1) ranging between 53% and 54% of all households between 2001 and 2021 and non-family households (shown in green in Figure 1) ranging between 46% and 47% in the same period.

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<sup>1</sup> A census family is now defined as a married or common-law couple without children or with the children of any/both partners; lone-parents with their children; or grandparents living with their grandchildren with no parents present. Multigenerational households include three generations (grandparents, parents, children) living in the same dwelling. The census now also accounts for census families living with additional persons (e.g. a sibling of a parent, a partner of an adult child) directly in the census profile.

The fastest growing household types in Vancouver are two-or-more-person non-family households (i.e. roommates) and couples without children, increasing by 15% and 13%, respectively, since 2016.

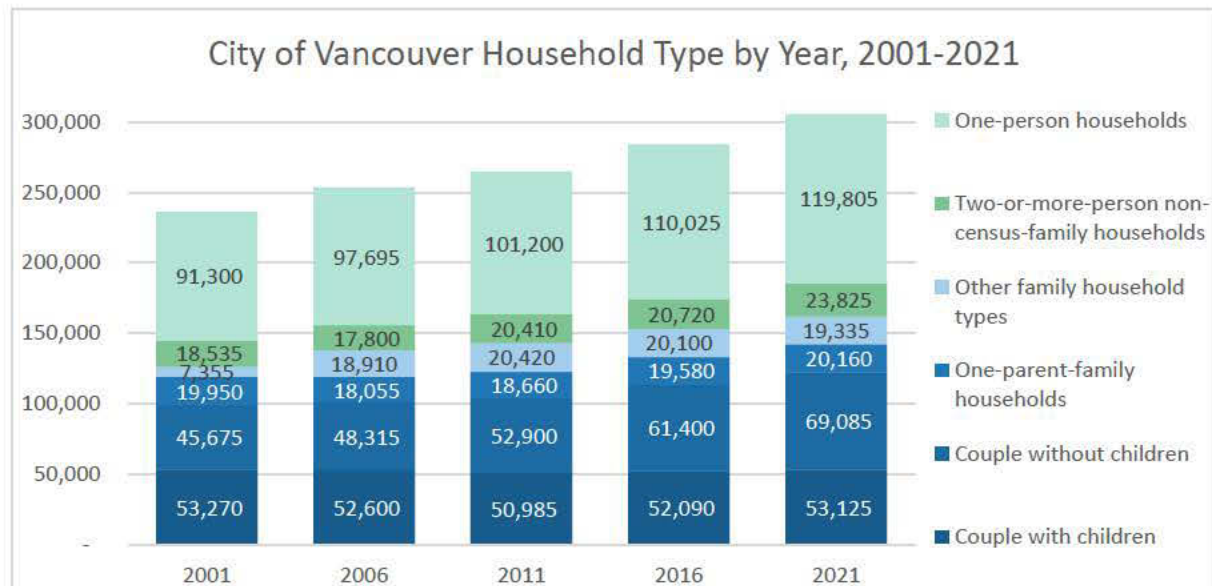


Figure 1: City of Vancouver Household Type, 2001-2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006, 2016 and 2021 Census of Population

City of Vancouver - Household type		2016		2021	
One-census family household without additional persons	Couples with children	52,090	18.3%	53,125	17.4%
	Couples without children	61,400	21.6%	69,085	22.6%
	One-parent family	19,580	6.9%	20,160	6.6%
Multigenerational households		8,810	3.1%	8,260	2.7%
Other census-family households (One-census-family households with additional persons or multiple census-families)		11,290	3.2%	11,075	3.6%
Two-or-more-person non-census-family households		20,720	7.3%	23,825	7.8%
One-person households		110,025	38.8%	119,805	39.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>283,915</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>305,335</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 1: City of Vancouver - Household type. Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2021 Census of Population

Overall, the breakdown of household types in Vancouver is generally consistent with the breakdown across the Metro Vancouver region, except for Vancouver's much greater share of one-person households relative to the region and a smaller percentage of couples with children, as shown in Figure 2.



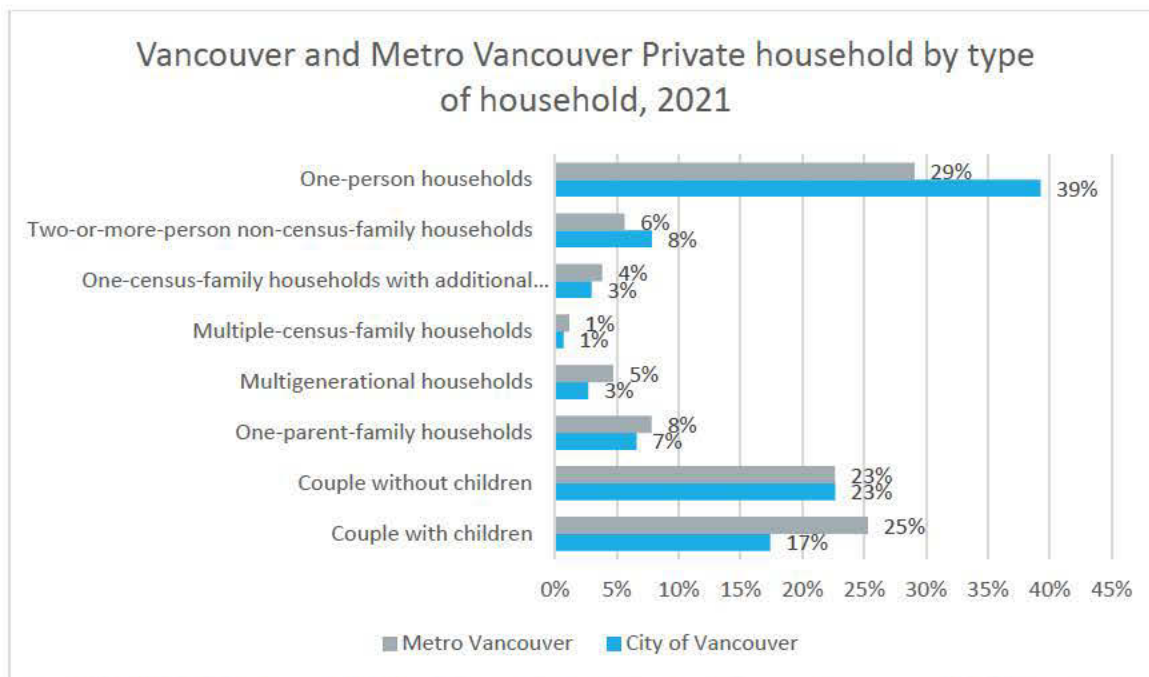


Figure 2: City of Vancouver and Metro Vancouver Private Household Type, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population

### ***One-person households***

One-person households are the most common household type Canada-wide and in Vancouver. Statistics Canada attributes this trend to population growth and aging, urbanization, cultural shifts, immigration and housing affordability.<sup>2</sup> Among the largest cities in Canada, Vancouver has the second highest proportion of one-person households (39%), behind Montreal (42%), and close to Toronto (33%), and Winnipeg (30%)

In Vancouver, one-person households have been increasing by an average of 7.0% per year since 2001, from 91,300 (39% of households) in 2001 to 119,805 (39% of households) in 2021. The overall increase in this household type contributed to Vancouver's average household size, which has been decreasing for the past two decades—from 2.3 in 2001 to 2.1 in 2021.

### ***Families with children***

Since 2001, Vancouver has been experiencing shifts in the number of couples with children—including a decline from 2001 to 2011 (53,270 to 50,985), then a more recent increase from 52,090 in 2016 and 53,125 in 2021. Despite this more recent increase, the city still saw an overall decline in the proportion of couples with children from 22.6% in 2001 to 17.4% in 2021, reflecting previous data indicating a flat or declining population of youth and children in the city.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the city saw an increase in the proportion and overall number of couples without children from 45,675 (19.3% of households) in 2001 to 69,085 (22.6% of households) in 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Home alone: More persons living solo than ever before, but roomies the fastest growing household type. Source: Statistics Canada

<sup>3</sup> City of Vancouver 2021 Census – Sex at birth and gender, age, and type of dwelling

The Downtown peninsula, Mount Pleasant, Oakridge, Marpole, and Killarney saw an increase in families with children. At the same time, other neighbourhoods experienced either a loss or minimal growth in family with children households. In general, areas with higher rates of overall dwelling growth have experienced a higher rate of growth in families with children.

### ***Same-gender, transgender, and non-binary couples***

Statistics Canada has introduced new information about different-gender couples, same-gender couples, transgender couples, and non-binary couples. We acknowledge this classification does not encompass the diversity of relationships or gender identities, and is a derivation of questions about relationships among the household, gender, and sex assigned at birth.

Across all couples, Metro Vancouver<sup>4</sup> has a proportion of 1.9% (11,630 couples) of same-gender, transgender, and non-binary couples, comparable to Montreal CMA (1.9%), and just below Victoria CMA (2.5%) and Halifax CMA (2.4%).

## **Income**

The 2021 Census mainly reports on people's incomes throughout the year 2020. As a result, the data reflects the cumulative impacts of many aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic: initial closures and income loss in many sectors; new government income support programs, many of which were time-limited; tentative re-opening in summer; and re-implementation of public health measures in the fall. Income data in the 2021 Census needs to be understood to reflect an exceptional and turbulent time. The longer-term impacts of the pandemic on migration, employment, incomes, policies, and programs remain unknown.

Because income data is administrative (e.g. linked to tax returns) rather than self-reported, Statistics Canada has published some more detailed and nuanced income data sources than in past censuses, including some data on income in 2019 and access to government support programs. However, further data and analysis are needed to fully understand income dynamics and inequities. While this initial release disaggregates 2020 income data by age and gender, future releases will add other population groups (e.g. Indigenous or racialized populations) or socioeconomic factors (e.g. housing tenure). In addition, pre-existing issues and trends in Vancouver, such as housing costs, regional development patterns and the risk of displacement cannot be measured directly without additional data.

### ***Median income***

As shown in Table 2, median income in the City of Vancouver increased substantially in 2020 (2021 Census) compared to 2015 (2016 Census). This was more than double the inflation rate: the all-items consumer price index for Metro Vancouver increased by about 11% in this period.<sup>5</sup> Of course, this data does not account for higher levels of inflation seen in 2022.

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<sup>4</sup> The data from Statistics Canada on gender diversity of couples is currently only available at the regional level

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, Table 18-10-0005-01, Consumer Price Index, annual average, not seasonally adjusted.

Census indicator	Applies to	2016 Census (2015 income)	2021 Census (2020 income)	Rate of change
Median individual income	People age 15+ in private households with income	\$32,896	\$42,000	28% increase
Median household income	Private households <sup>6</sup>	\$65,423	\$82,000	25% increase
Median family income	Economic families <sup>7</sup> in private households	\$90,921	\$113,000	24% increase

Data source: Statistics Canada, 2016 and 2021 Census of Population

Table 2 Median individual, household and family income for the City of Vancouver, 2015 and 2020

Statistics Canada observes that median income increased across Canada and in the majority of metropolitan areas across the country. This is due to growth in employment income prior to COVID-19 and government transfers and support programs during COVID.

In Vancouver, median individual income increased by 8% above inflation from 2015 to 2019 and then another 7% above inflation from 2019 to 2020. The gender gap decreased in 2020, as median income for women+<sup>8</sup> increased from 2019 to 2020 at more than double the rate of men+. As of 2020, median income for women+ in Vancouver is 14% lower than for men+. As noted above, income data by other identities such as race is not yet available.

Median household income has also increased faster than inflation since the last census period. Figure 3 below breaks down median income by household type.

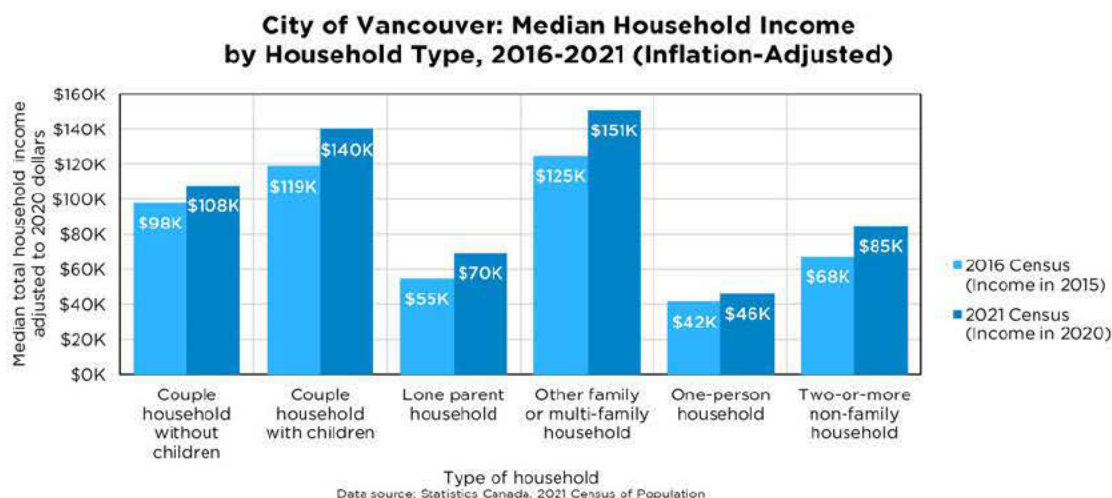


Figure 3 Median household income by household type, 2016-2021

While all types of household saw incomes increase faster than inflation, family households, particularly lone parent-led households, saw the fastest rate of increase. In addition to

6 Private households in the census do not include collective dwellings (e.g. some seniors' residences, hospitals, shelters or hotels, including some SROs). In the Vancouver context, this means some situations in which people are likely to be low-income are not included in most census data.

7 Statistics Canada defines an economic family as "two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law union, adoption or a foster relationship".

8 As noted in the previous memo to Council, Statistics Canada is releasing gender-based data for the City of Vancouver using "women+" and "men+" categories. The "+" indicates that these categories also include people with other gender identities. Although they are classified as non-binary persons by Statistics Canada, they are distributed into these categories for reporting to avoid data suppression for relatively smaller populations. City staff will attempt to access more disaggregated data in future.



pandemic supports, this may reflect additional income supports and programs to support families with children, such as the Canada Child Benefit.

### Income categories

Figure 4 below shows the estimated number of households in the income categories used in the *Housing Vancouver Strategy*. Households with higher incomes have increased. As of the 2021 Census, more than one in five Vancouver households have incomes over \$150,000.

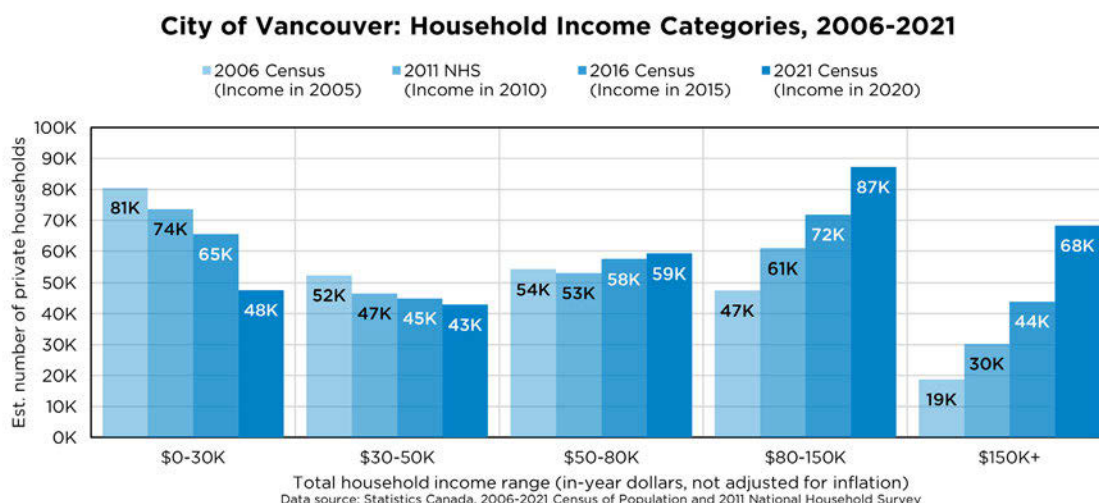


Figure 4 City of Vancouver number of households in income categories<sup>9</sup>, 2006-2021

### Low income

The initial release of income data from the 2021 Census does not yet include data on Canada's Official Poverty Line, nor the Market Basket Measure (MBM), which is based on the cost of basic needs. The MBM is the metric tracked in Vancouver's Healthy City Dashboard and used in local, provincial, and federal poverty reduction targets. The initial census release instead uses the Low Income Measure (LIM), which is a relative measure set at half of the adjusted national median income. An individual living alone is considered low-income in the LIM if their after-tax income is under \$26,503; people living in a household of four will all be low-income if their combined after-tax income is under \$53,005.<sup>10</sup>

Based on the after-tax LIM, Vancouver's low income rate has decreased to 13% in 2020 compared to 19% in 2015. This is consistent with a decline seen in most cities in Canada, although Vancouver still has a relatively higher rate than most other cities. Figure 5 below shows trends from 2016 to 2021 in the largest cities (500,000 people or more) in Canada. All these cities saw a sharp decline in the percentage of population with income below the LIM, though Edmonton and Calgary saw a more modest decline. Statistics Canada attributes the

<sup>9</sup> Housing Vancouver income categories were set based on a percentage of the area median income to identify five categories (very-low, low, moderate, above-moderate and high incomes), then matching them to housing types affordable to these incomes.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada, Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021. [https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/tab/index-eng.cfm?ID=t2\\_4](https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/tab/index-eng.cfm?ID=t2_4).



reduction to pandemic income supports and the implementation of the Canada Child Benefit.<sup>11</sup>

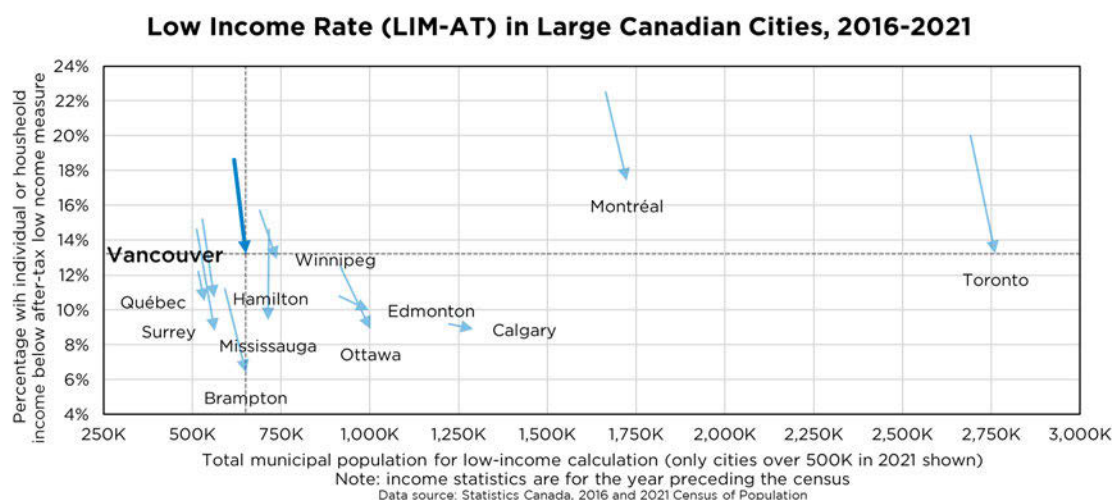


Figure 5 Low income rate in large Canadian cities, 2016-2021

The low income rate for seniors and older adults did not decrease as substantially as for other age groups. 18% of people age 65 and over are considered low income using the LIM in 2020, compared to 21% in 2015. Young adults (age 18-24) continue to have the highest rate of low income in Vancouver (19%), but at a substantially lower rate than calculated in the previous census (28%). Further data could differentiate the impact of COVID income supports from demographic shifts such as fewer temporary residents in Canada, or shifts in the student population.

There are gender differences in low income rates as well. Overall, 13.5% of women+ were classified as low income, compared to 13.0% of men+. The greatest difference was seen among people 65 and older, suggesting that women+ are more likely to experience challenges with income poverty as they age.

### ***Income inequity***

The Gini index is one way to measure income inequity: it is a theoretical scale from zero (perfectly equal distribution of income) to one (all income held by a single household). Figure 6 below shows scores for adjusted after-tax household income. After-tax income in 2020 was more evenly distributed than in 2015; Vancouver's score was reduced to 0.36 from 0.41.

11 Statistics Canada, "Pandemic benefits cushion losses for low income earners and narrow income inequality – after-tax income grows across Canada except in Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador." The Daily, July 13, 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220713/dq220713d-eng.htm>

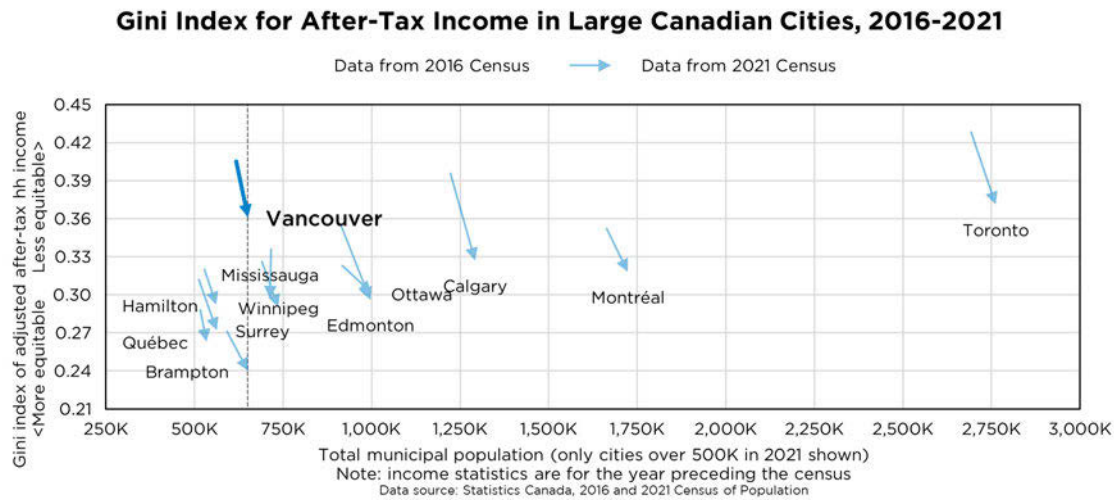


Figure 6 Gini index for adjusted after-tax household income in large Canadian cities, 2016-2021

However, Vancouver's score remains one of the highest, indicating a more inequitable distribution than in other cities. Figure 7 below shows an indicator of income polarization, with 15% of people in Vancouver having incomes in the bottom 10% of Canada and 16% in Canada's top 10%.<sup>12</sup> This chart also shows a potential indicator of the inaccessibility of the city, as net population growth continues to be concentrated in the highest groups.

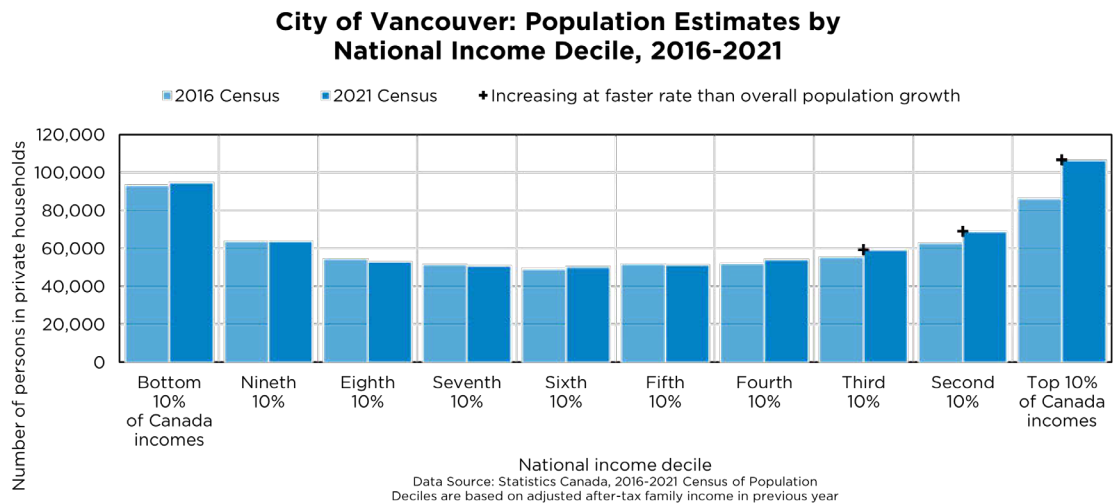


Figure 7 City of Vancouver population by national income deciles, 2016-2021

Although disaggregated data and intersectional data is not available from the 2021 Census, income inequities also intersect with other aspects of people's identities, such as Indigenous or racial identity, immigration, disability, or age. In the 2016 Census, for example, Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant residents were underrepresented in higher-income groups.

<sup>12</sup> On July 26, Statistics Canada noted an error in the initial data released by adjusted after-tax family income deciles, so these figures will be updated in future. Staff are confident that the high-level findings are nonetheless valid for the City of Vancouver.

## COVID-19 pandemic impacts

In 2020, government supports were targeted to relatively lower income earners. Figure 8 below shows the redistributive effect of these programs: 85% of people in the lowest income decile saw their incomes increase in 2020 compared to 2019. Note again that people experiencing homelessness or marginal housing, or people living in care settings, are not included in census data, so this chart may not include some of the lowest income situations.

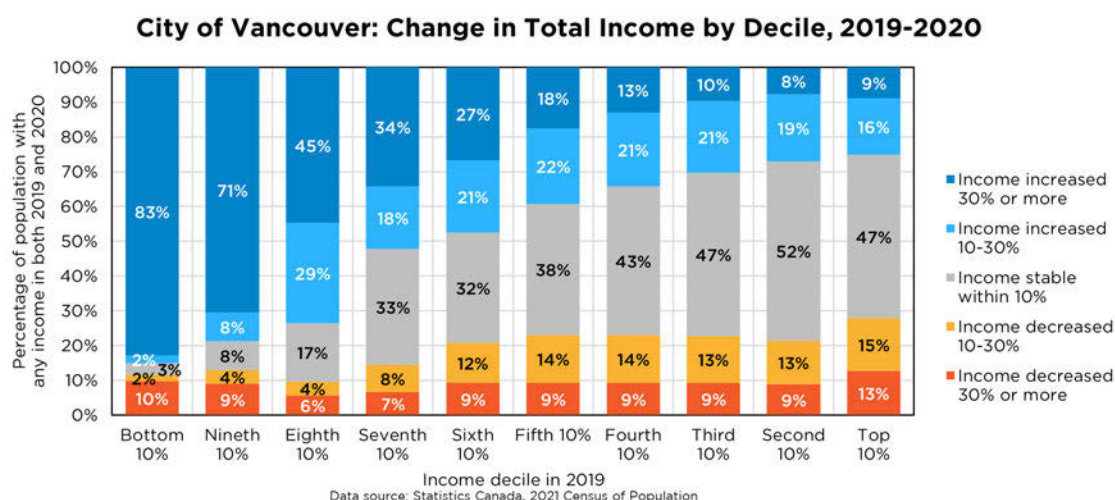


Figure 8 City of Vancouver change in total income by decile, 2019-2020

Figure 9 illustrates this directly; 78% of Vancouver residents accessed a median amount of about \$8,000 from government transfers in 2020, compared to 62% accessing a median of about \$2,000 in 2019. Nearly a third of Vancouverites accessed replacement income such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or Employment Insurance (EI) in 2020, eight times the rate that accessed this source of income in 2019. Median income from employment was very similar from 2019 to 2020.

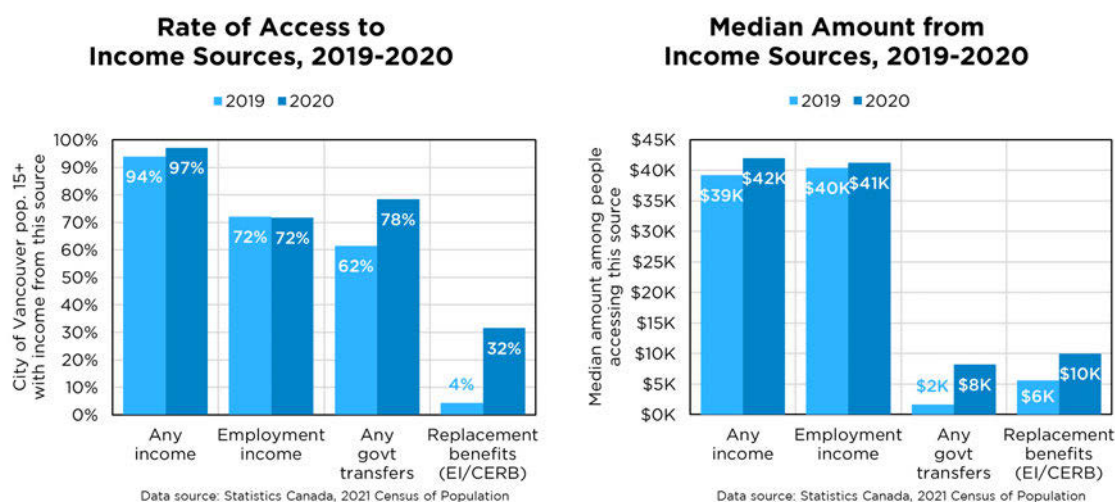


Figure 9 Rate of access and median amount from selected income sources, 2019-2020

### ***Monitoring future income trends***

Overall, there is strong evidence that the widespread income support programs created during the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact in reducing income inequity. However, there is a great deal of uncertainty whether these outcomes will be sustained as these programs are no longer operating, and what the long-term trajectory is for key indicators in Vancouver. There continue to be significant affordability challenges in Vancouver. Many people experience acute gaps in basic needs, the risk of displacement continues, and Vancouver's unaffordability may discourage people with more modest incomes from moving to the city.

Further data from the 2021 Census will disaggregate 2020 income data across different population groups and add nuanced analysis of the impacts of government programs created during the pandemic. Staff will also continue to access other data sources, such as annual income tax data, to monitor trends between census periods. Tools such as the Healthy City Dashboard will enable ongoing public monitoring and reporting of new indicators of income equity in the city as they become available.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Census data is a foundational input into all of the city's plans, policies, and projects. Staff will continue to analyze the data from this and future releases and incorporate it into work across City departments.

Statistics Canada is releasing datasets regarding language on August 17, 2022, and staff will continue to summarize the key findings of each census release in memos for Council. Appendix A summarizes the remaining 2021 Census Program release dates and topics.

### **FINAL REMARKS**

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact Branislav Henselmann or Theresa O'Donnell.



Branislav Henselmann  
Acting General Manager  
Arts, Culture and Community Services  
[branislav.henselmann@vancouver.ca](mailto:branislav.henselmann@vancouver.ca)



Theresa O'Donnell  
General Manager  
Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability  
[theresa.o'donnell@vancouver.ca](mailto:theresa.o'donnell@vancouver.ca)



**2021 Census of Population initial data release dates**

<b>Release Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Theme</b>
February 9, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population and dwelling counts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada's growing population and where they are living</li> </ul>
April 27, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Sex at birth and gender</li> <li>• Type of dwelling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada's shifting demographic profile</li> </ul>
July 13, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families, households, and marital status</li> <li>• Canadian military experience</li> <li>• Income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portrait of Canada's families and households</li> <li>• Contemporary portrait of Canadian Veterans</li> <li>• Income profile of Canadians</li> </ul>
August 17, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic diversity and use of English and French in Canada</li> </ul>
September 21, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous Peoples</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Nations Peoples, Métis and Inuit in Canada</li> <li>• Canada's housing portrait</li> </ul>
October 26, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigration, place of birth, and citizenship</li> <li>• Ethnocultural and religious diversity</li> <li>• Mobility and migration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portrait of citizenship and immigration in Canada</li> <li>• Ethnocultural and religious composition of the population</li> <li>• Mobility and migration</li> </ul>
November 30, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Labour</li> <li>• Language of work</li> <li>• Commuting</li> <li>• Instruction in the official minority language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education in Canada</li> <li>• The changing dynamics of the Canadian labour force and how people get to work</li> <li>• Instruction in the official minority language</li> </ul>

Additional information on census data is available on Statistics Canada's Census of Population website at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>.