

From: ["Levitt, Karen" <karen.levitt@vancouver.ca>](mailto:karen.levitt@vancouver.ca)  
To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)  
Date: 12/19/2022 12:59:13 PM  
Subject: [City of Vancouver 2021 Census – Indigenous Peoples and Language](#)

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Dear Mayor and Council,

Given the positive feedback received regarding Sandra and Theresa's recent memo to you re: the recent 2021 Census release, we are forwarding you the memos that they sent earlier in the fall regarding earlier 2021 Census data releases.

Please find below and attached the memo re: 2021 Census Data re: Indigenous Peoples and Languages.

All the best,

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, Sḵwx̱wú7mesh/Squamish and səliłwətaʔ/Tsleil-Waututh nations

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**From:** Mochrie, Paul <[Paul.Mochrie@vancouver.ca](mailto:Paul.Mochrie@vancouver.ca)>  
**Sent:** Monday, October 17, 2022 7:24 AM  
**To:** Direct to Mayor and Council - DL  
**Cc:** City Manager's Correspondence Group - DL; Singh, Sandra <[Sandra.Singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:Sandra.Singh@vancouver.ca)>; O'Donnell, Theresa <[Theresa.O'Donnell@vancouver.ca](mailto:Theresa.O'Donnell@vancouver.ca)>  
**Subject:** City of Vancouver 2021 Census – Indigenous Peoples and Language

Dear Mayor and Council,

The attached memo from Sandra Singh (ACCS) and Theresa O'Donnell (PDS) provides an update on City of Vancouver 2021 Census – Indigenous Peoples and Language data.

Highlights: 2021 Census – Indigenous Peoples and Language include:

- At least 15,000 people with Indigenous identity live in Vancouver. The Indigenous population continues to grow more quickly than the non-Indigenous population, although the rate slowed in 2021.
- At least 190 different languages are used among Vancouver's population, including 26 Indigenous languages.
- Vancouver remains one of the most linguistically diverse cities in Canada: 44% of Vancouverites have a non-English mother tongue, 26% usually use non-English languages at home, and 6% do not have conversational knowledge of English.

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.

Should you have any questions, please contact Sandra Singh ([Sandra.singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:Sandra.singh@vancouver.ca)) or Theresa O'Donnell ([Theresa.o'donnell@vancouver.ca](mailto:Theresa.o'donnell@vancouver.ca)) and they will ensure the queries are responded to through the weekly Council questions process.

Best,  
Paul

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## MEMORANDUM

October 14, 2022

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager  
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager  
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager  
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk  
Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC  
Teresa Jong, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office  
Neil Monckton, Chief of Staff, 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: Sandra Singh, General Manager, ACCS  
Theresa O'Donnell, General Manager, PDS

SUBJECT: City of Vancouver 2021 Census – Indigenous Peoples and Language

RTS #: N/A

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## PURPOSE

This memo presents data released on September 21, 2022 from the recent 2021 Census, focusing on Indigenous peoples in Vancouver as well as data released on August 17, 2022 focusing on languages used and understood by people in the city.

## BACKGROUND

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](#)), May 10, 2022 ([age, sex at birth, gender, and type of dwelling](#)), and August 5, 2022 (households, families, and income).

These releases provide the first indicators from the 2021 Census of cultural identity and diversity among Vancouver residents. Further data will be released in October with more disaggregated datasets later in 2022 and 2023.

Overall, Vancouver remains one of the most diverse cities in Canada: a place of many languages and cultures, including a large and diverse Indigenous population.

## DISCUSSION

### Highlights: 2021 Census – Indigenous Peoples and Language

- At least 15,000 people with Indigenous identity live in Vancouver. The Indigenous population continues to grow more quickly than the non-Indigenous population, although the rate slowed in 2021.
- At least 190 different languages are used among Vancouver’s population, including 26 Indigenous languages.
- Vancouver remains one of the most linguistically diverse cities in Canada: 44% of Vancouverites have a non-English mother tongue, 26% usually use non-English languages at home, and 6% do not have conversational knowledge of English.

### Data collection and limitations

A person is considered to have an Indigenous identity based on their answers to any of three questions in the 2021 Census. These include self-identifying as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit; reporting Status under the Indian Act; and/or reporting membership in a First Nation. All of these questions are self-reported in the census as part of the long form questionnaire. In an urban setting the long form is administered to a sample of 25% of private households, while enumeration in some Indigenous-governed communities may vary, especially as these communities were also responding to COVID-19. In Metro Vancouver, most Indigenous communities were enumerated in 2021, except for the Katzie Nation community on Barnston Island.

Language data is also self-reported. Questions on mother tongue, home language, and official language knowledge are part of the short-form questionnaire that all households complete. Data on non-official language knowledge is collected through the long form.

While the long form provides valid and reliable data for the City of Vancouver overall, it excludes people outside of private households, and therefore is likely to exclude people in precarious housing situations and some older populations in institutional settings. As well, accessibility and safety barriers to completing the census may result in an undercount of some populations, such as undocumented immigrants.

Indigenous peoples are consistently undercounted in the census program, with one study in Toronto estimating that the Indigenous population in that city is two to four times larger than reported.<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada observes that people have become more likely to identify as Indigenous over time, even if they did not self-identify on previous censuses<sup>2</sup>, suggesting incremental progress toward more valid census data. The 2021 Census remains an important source of quantitative population data for Vancouver, and the estimates from this data source are presented in this memo as published by Statistics Canada without adjusting for undercounting. However, the City recognizes the importance of complementing census data with community knowledge and other more grounded, culturally safe ways of collecting data.

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<sup>1</sup> Well Living House, Our Health Counts Toronto, 2021 Indigenous population estimates for the City of Toronto: <http://www.welllivinghouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/OHC-Toronto-2021-Population-Estimates.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, “Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed”, *The Daily*, September 21, 2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm?HPA=1>.

# Indigenous populations

Vancouver is situated on the unceded homelands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Vancouver is also home to at least 14,660 urban Indigenous people estimated in the 2021 Census. Another 850 Indigenous people live in the Musqueam reserve community in the southwest of Vancouver. Figure 1 below shows trends from 2001 to 2021.

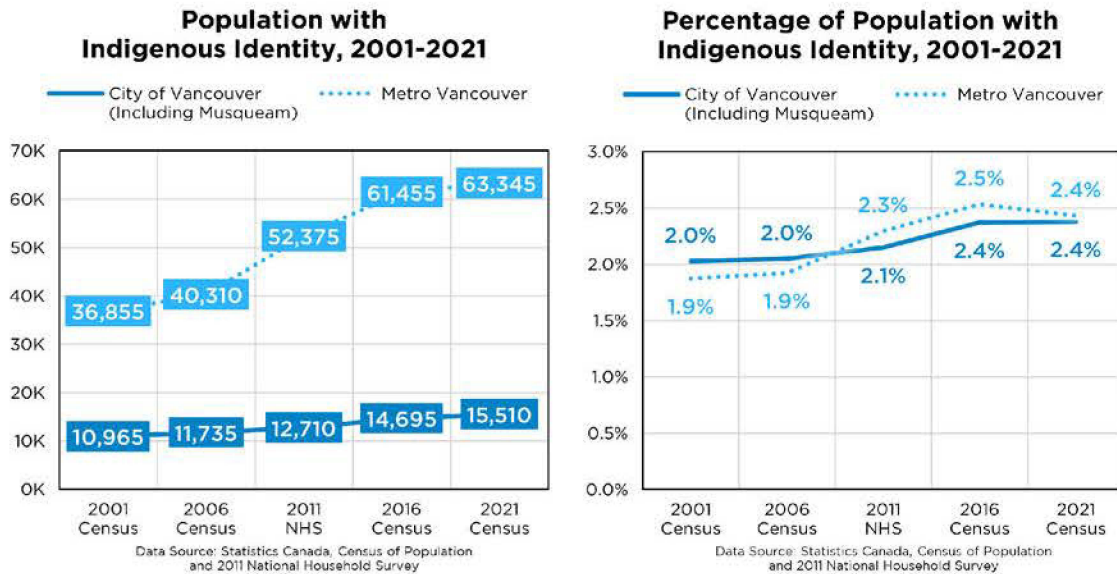


Figure 1: Number and percentage of Vancouver and Metro population with Indigenous identity, 2001-2021

Until 2016, Indigenous populations in Vancouver were growing much more quickly than non-Indigenous populations, but this trend has slowed in 2021. As shown in Figure 2 below, the Indigenous population in the City of Vancouver grew at a slightly faster rate from 2016 to 2021, but across the broader region non-Indigenous populations grew faster.

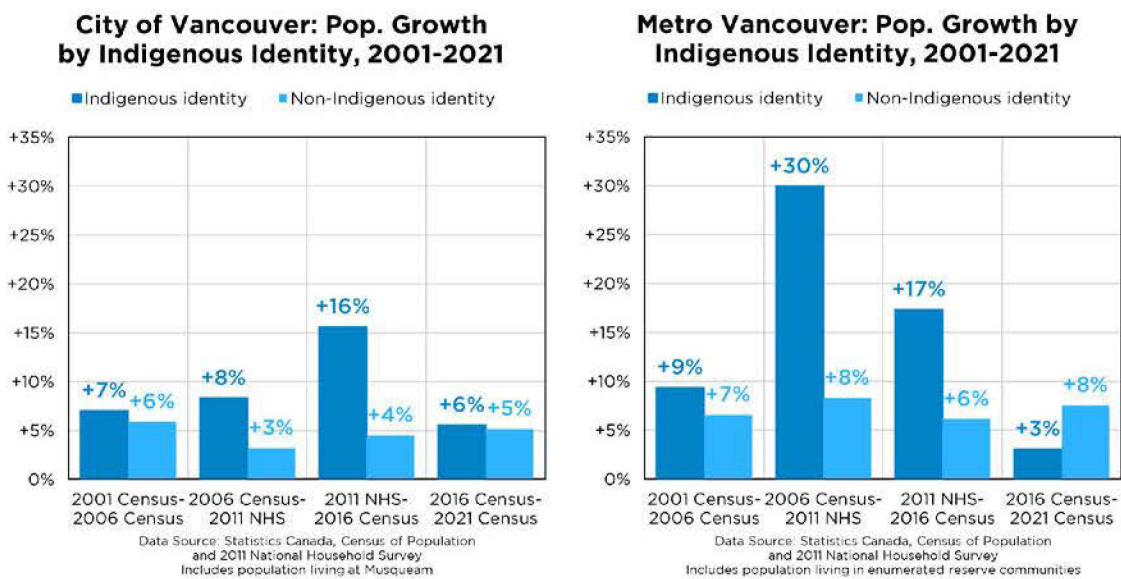


Figure 2: Growth between census periods by Indigenous identity in Vancouver and Metro, 2001-2021





## Indigenous languages

The Indigenous languages of these lands are hən̓q̓əmi̓n̓əm/Hunq'eme'nem and Skwxwú7mesh Sníchim. These languages are reported in the 2021 Census as Halkomelem and Squamish, and people may also report their language knowledge using more general terms such as Salish languages. Many other Indigenous languages are also spoken in Vancouver, reflecting the diverse Indigenous populations and communities living in the city.

About 1,800 people in the Metro Vancouver region, including 600 in the City of Vancouver proper, report having conversational knowledge of at least one Indigenous language. As noted earlier, the long-form census is likely to undercount Indigenous populations and languages. Nonetheless, this data is an indicator of the diversity of Indigenous populations in the region and the importance of supporting language revitalization and visibility.

Figure 5 below provides the ten Indigenous languages in both Metro Vancouver and the City of Vancouver known by the greatest number of people. Across Metro Vancouver, Statistics Canada reports the greatest number of people with knowledge of Squamish and Halkomelem. Within the City of Vancouver, a large number of people living at Musqueam know Halkomelem. Other Indigenous languages known by many people in Vancouver are Nehiyawewin (Plains Cree), Cree (not otherwise specified), Ojibway, Nisga'a, Mohawk, Haida, Dakelh (Carrier), and Tsimshian. A number of people also reported specific Indigenous languages that are not reported individually by Statistics Canada but collapsed into an "n.i.e." (not indicated elsewhere) category. A full list of language categories is included in Figure 15 in Appendix A.

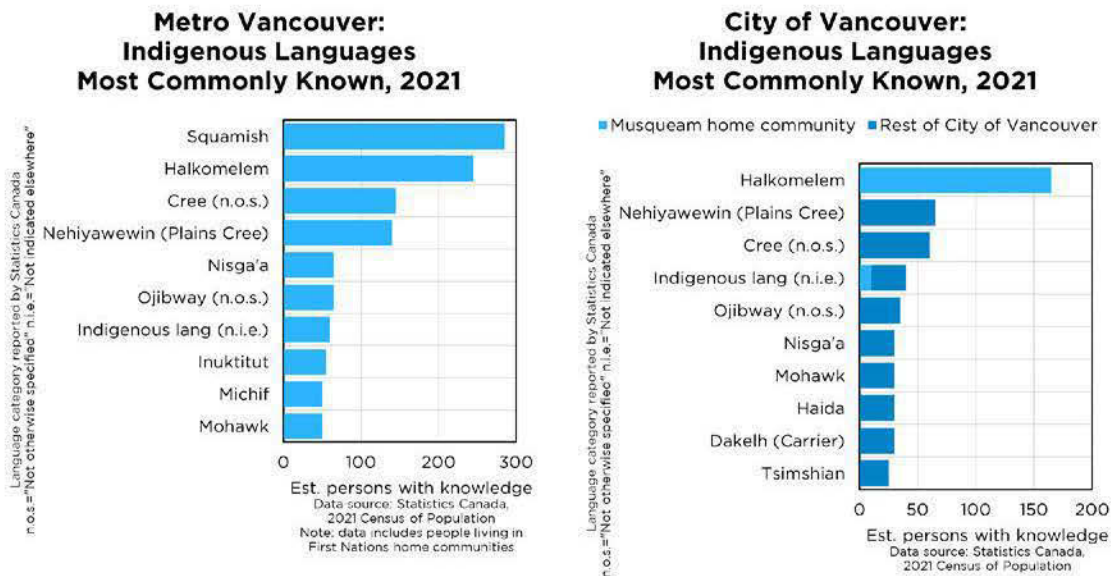


Figure 5: Indigenous languages known in Metro Vancouver, 2021

While language knowledge provides the largest picture of Indigenous languages, other indicators are also available. Within the City of Vancouver, about 300 people report an Indigenous mother tongue. Nearly 400 people report using an Indigenous language at home at least occasionally.



## Overall language knowledge

At least 190 languages are used in conversations in Vancouver. This includes 26 Indigenous languages, Canada's official languages (English and French), and 162 non-official languages. Fifty-five percent (55%) of people can hold a conversation in at least one non-official language. Figure 6 summarizes language knowledge across the population.

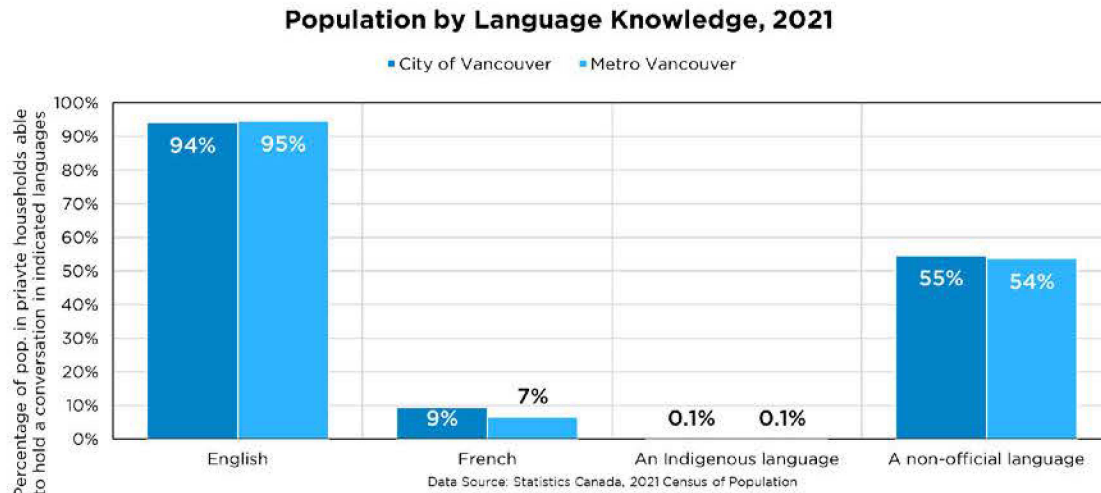


Figure 6: Population by knowledge of languages, 2021

Figure 7 below shows the ten non-official languages that the greatest number of people in Vancouver can hold a conversation in.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen percent (15%) of Vancouver residents know Cantonese, 11% know Mandarin, and 6% know Spanish. Compared to Metro Vancouver, the City has relatively more people who know Cantonese and fewer who know Punjabi or Hindi.

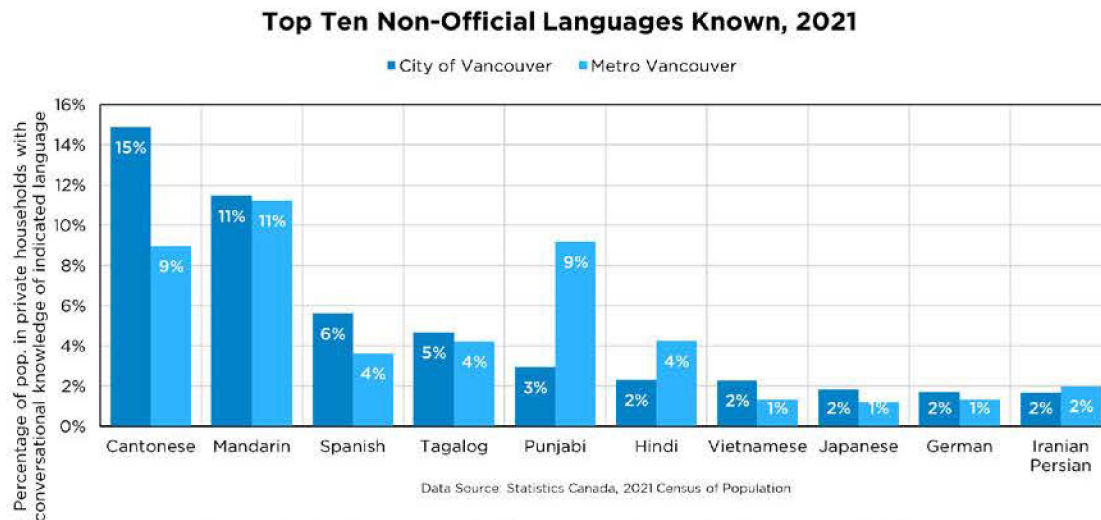


Figure 7: Top ten non-official languages known in Vancouver, 2021

<sup>3</sup> This analysis excludes Statistics Canada's categories that include multiple languages or language families not specified further. This may result in Persian languages being undercounted, as nearly 13 thousand Vancouver residents, or 2% of the population, have been coded to have knowledge of "Indo-Iranian languages, not indicated elsewhere".

Nearly 40,000 people in the City of Vancouver, or 6% of the total population, are not able to have a conversation in English. This is one of the highest rates among large cities in Canada. As shown in Figure 8, older residents are less likely to have knowledge of English.

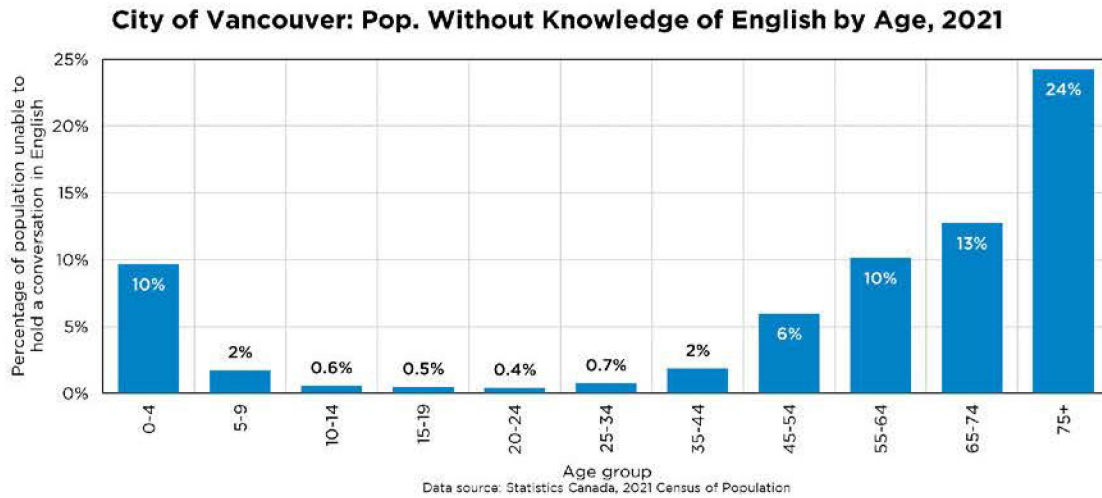


Figure 8: Population without knowledge of English by age group, 2021

## Mother tongue and usual home language

A person's mother tongue is the first language they learned in childhood and still understand. In the City of Vancouver, 44% of the population has a mother tongue other than English. Figure 9 below compares the rate of non-official mother tongues (i.e. not English or French) in large Canadian cities, showing that Vancouver has a higher rate than many other major cities, but a lower rate than some suburban municipalities with large newcomer populations.

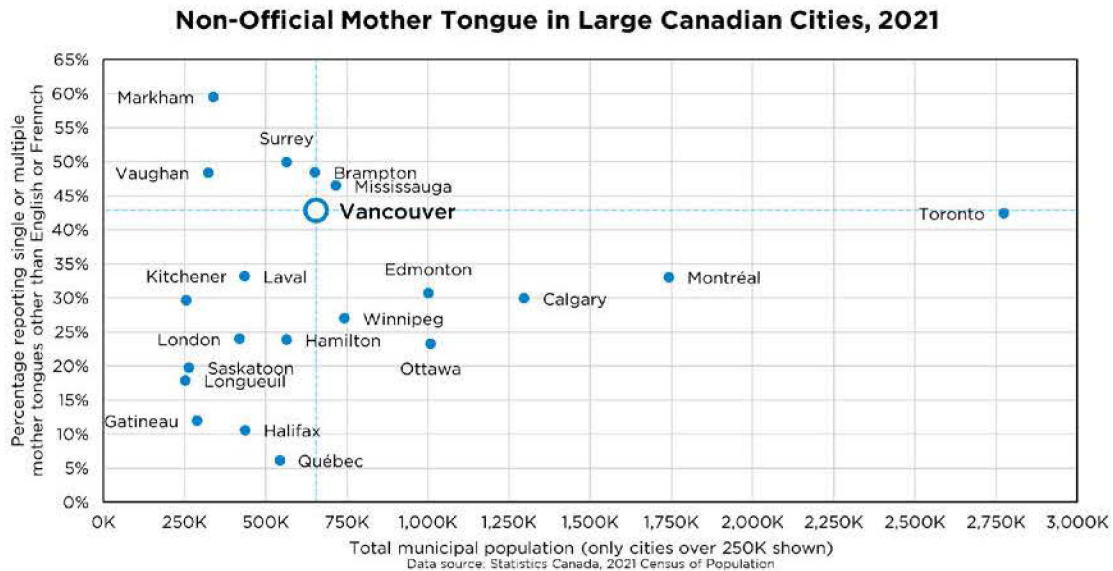


Figure 9: Population with a non-official mother tongue in large Canadian cities, 2021



The Census also asks what language people use most often at home. Especially for people living alone, this is usually the language they are most comfortable using. Twenty-six (26%) of Vancouverites usually use a non-English language at home. Figure 10 below shows that this is also a relatively higher rate than many large cities in Canada.

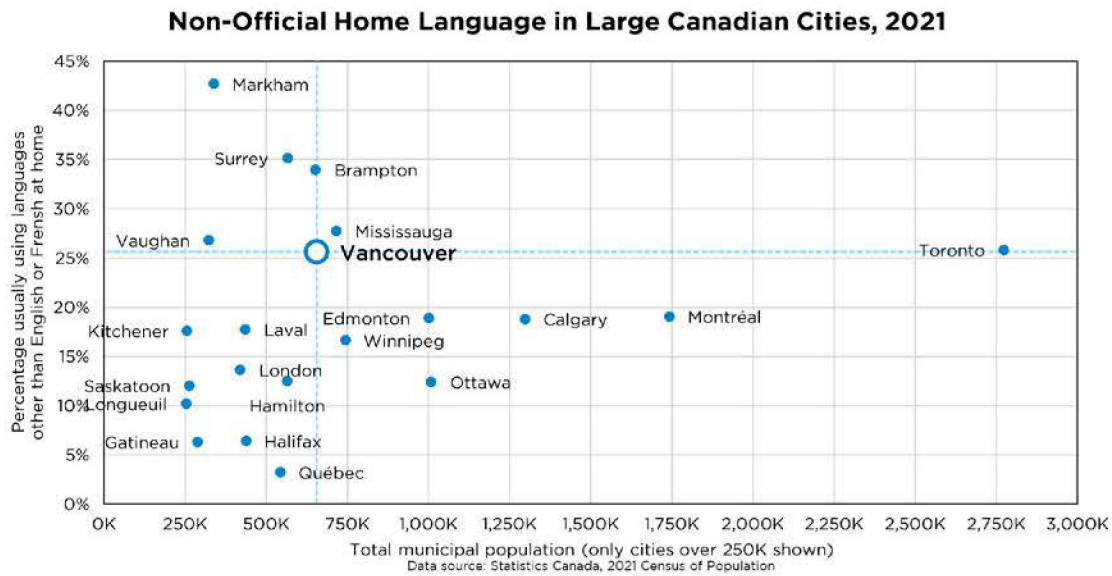


Figure 10: Population with a non-official home language in large Canadian cities, 2021

People with non-English languages are making up a smaller share of the City of Vancouver’s population, while rates grow in other parts of the region. As shown in Figure 11 below, the rate of non-English mother tongue in the City and the broader region are now equal.

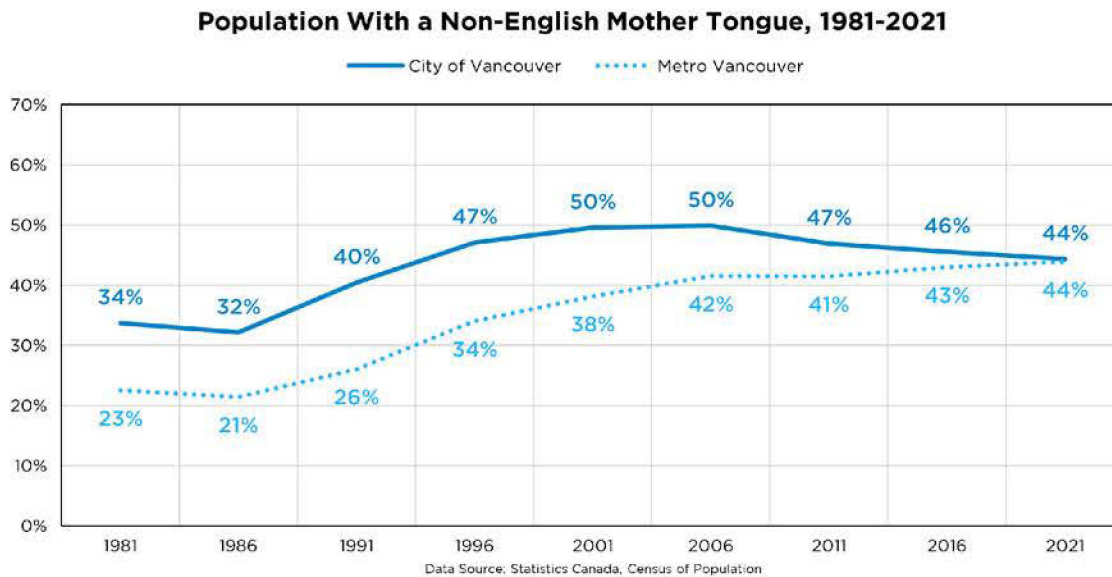


Figure 11: Population with a non-English mother tongue in Vancouver, 1981-2021

Figure 12 below illustrates the ten most commonly identified non-English mother tongues among Vancouver residents compared to Metro Vancouver overall. Similar to language

knowledge, the City of Vancouver has relatively more people with a Cantonese mother tongue and fewer with a Punjabi mother tongue.

### Top Ten Non-English Mother Tongues, 2021

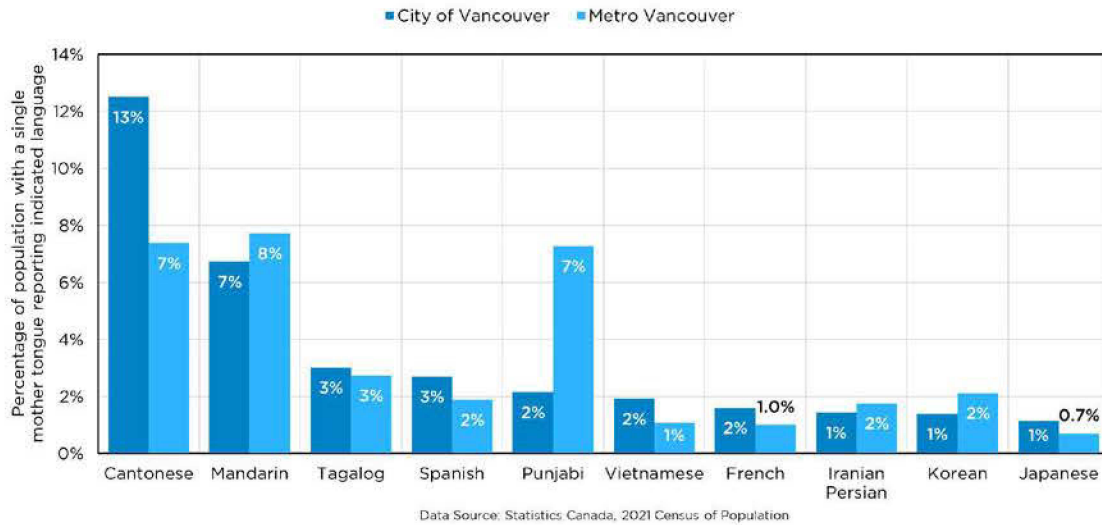


Figure 12: Top non-English mother tongues used in Vancouver, 2021

## Multiple home languages

The 2021 Census includes more detailed information on how people use languages at home. Figure 13 below provides more nuanced data on all languages that people regularly use at home. Forty-four percent (44%) of people in the City of Vancouver, and 45% of people in the broader Metro Vancouver region, use a non-English language at home at least some of the time.

### Population by All Languages Used at Home, 2021

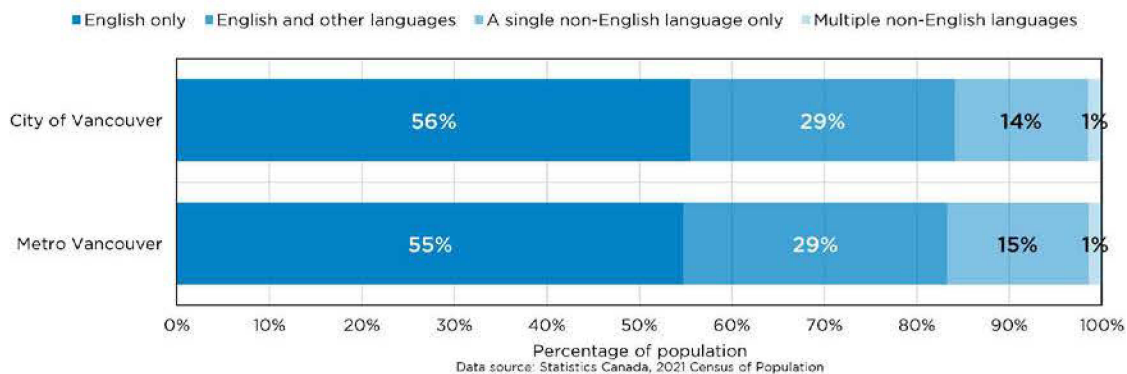


Figure 13: Population by all languages used at home, 2021



## Language use across Vancouver neighbourhoods

Many linguistic and cultural communities in Vancouver are located in specific areas of the city, and all of the language indicators in this memo can be further broken down to understand these patterns. Data by City of Vancouver local areas or other City-defined neighbourhood boundaries will not be available until 2023, but the initial data released can be mapped by Statistics Canada boundaries such as census tracts.

The maps in Figure 14 below show the six most commonly-used non-English home languages across the city. The maps show the rate of use of these languages by census tract, illustrating different patterns among people who use each of these languages.

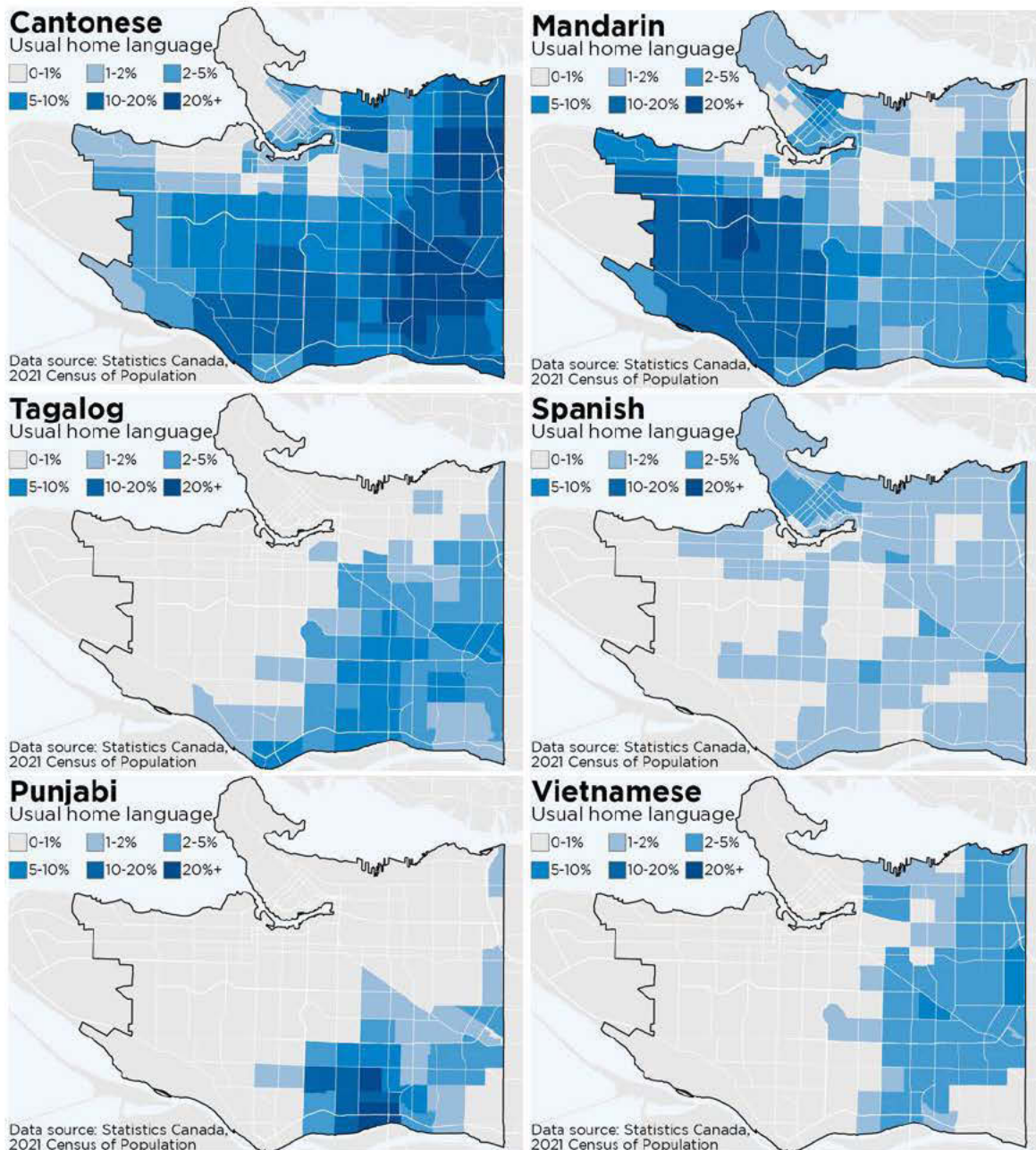


Figure 14: Maps of six most commonly-used non-English home languages in Vancouver by census tract, 2021

## 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.

On October 26th, Statistics Canada is releasing datasets regarding on immigration, place of birth, and citizenship; ethnocultural and religious diversity; and mobility and migration. Staff will continue to analyze the key findings of each census release. Appendix B summarizes the remaining 2021 Census Program release dates and topics.

## FINAL REMARKS

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.

If Council has any questions or requires further information, please contact Sandra Singh or Theresa O'Donnell and they will ensure responses through the weekly Council Q&As.



Sandra Singh  
General Manager  
Arts, Culture and Community Services  
[sandra.singh@vancouver.ca](mailto:sandra.singh@vancouver.ca)



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



# Full list of Indigenous languages known by people in Metro Vancouver in the 2021 Census

## Indigenous Languages Known in Metro Vancouver, 2021 Census

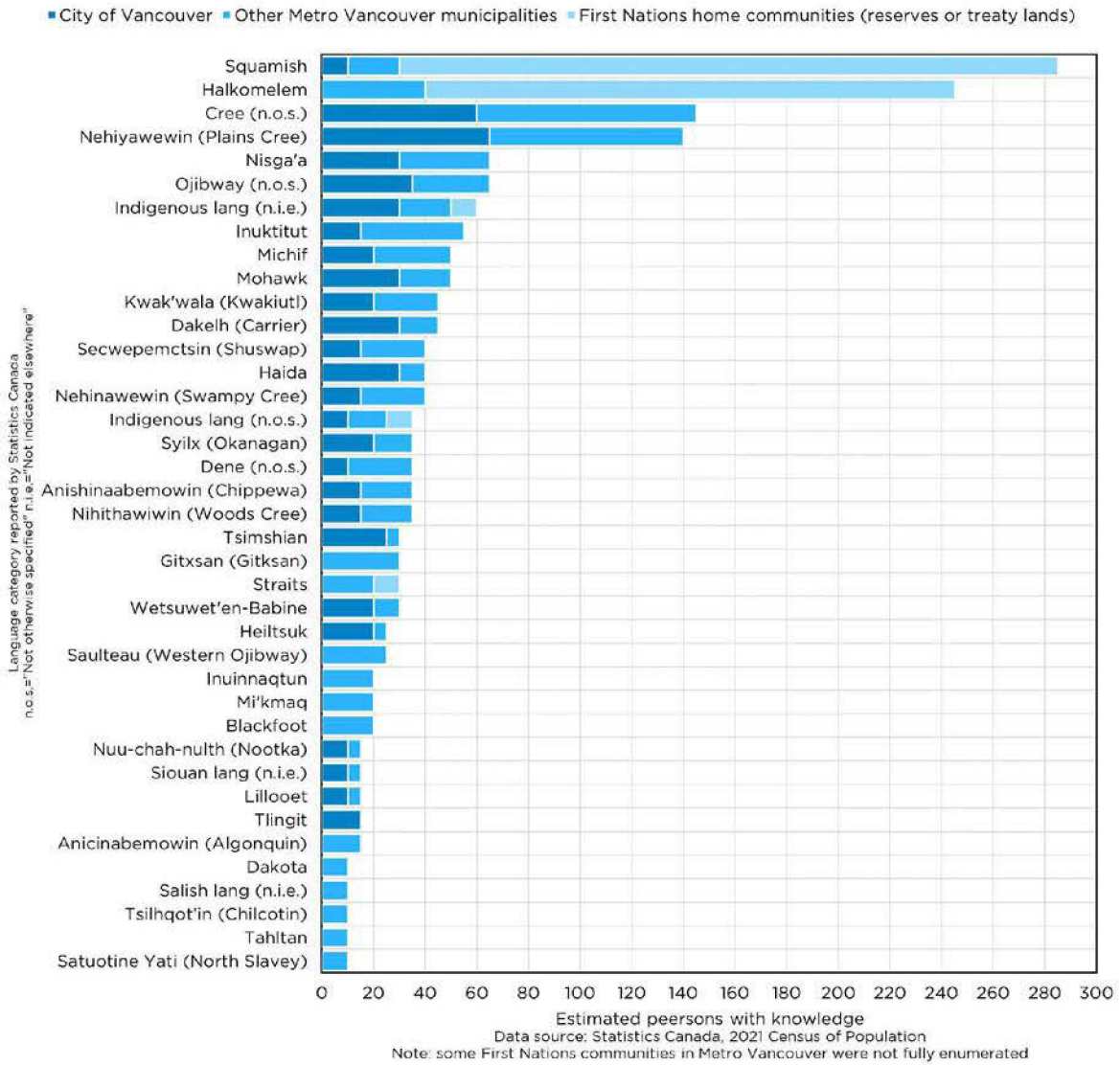


Figure 15 Indigenous languages known in Metro Vancouver, 2021 Census

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

Release Date	Topic	Theme
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>.