



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

NEWS RELEASE

ANNUAL QUALITY OF LIFE REPORT CARD FINDS CANADA'S CHILDREN, IMMIGRANTS GETTING LEFT BEHIND

Canada's Vital Signs 2008 also reports Canadians improving education levels, showing more interest in arts

OTTAWA (October 7, 2008) – Child poverty in Canada is stuck at the same level as 1989 and immigrant family incomes are falling behind, according to *Canada's Vital Signs 2008*, the annual report card on quality of life from Community Foundations of Canada (CFC).

Highlights of the report were released today and show:

- More than one in five Canadian children (23 per cent or 1.6 million) lived in poverty in 2006. This is virtually the same level as in 1989, when Canada pledged to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. At the current rate, achieving this goal would take 43 more years or until 2050.
- While the median income of non-immigrant Canadian families increased by over 5% from 2000 to 2005, immigrant families' incomes fell by one per cent and recent immigrants' (those in Canada less than five years) incomes fell more than three per cent. The situation is most striking in Canada's largest cities, where recent immigrants' incomes were half the median income of non-immigrant families: Toronto – 50 per cent, Montreal - 51.1 per cent, Vancouver - 51.8 per cent.

Canada's Vital Signs 2008 also includes some revealing trends about Canadians' individual challenges and achievements.

- More Canadians are finishing high school. In 2007, only 22 per cent of Canadians hadn't finished high school, down from almost 38 per cent in 1990, which bodes well for Canadians' economic success and competitiveness. However, there are some disturbing gaps in education levels. Among Canadians aged 25-44, the share of men without a high school education is more than 30 per cent higher than that of women. In 2006, 43.7 per cent of aboriginal people did not have a high school diploma.
- The obesity rate in Canada has swollen to 16 per cent in 2007 from 12 per cent in 1996, increasing the risk of future health problems and escalating health care costs.
- Canadians are showing increasing interest in the arts. About 41 per cent of Canadian adults reported attending a live arts performance in 2005, up from 38 per cent in 1998.

“At a time when Canadians are considering our country’s priorities and determining its future direction, *Canada’s Vital Signs* challenges us all to think about what actions we can take, as individuals and as a society, to improve quality of life for ourselves and other Canadians,” said Monica Patten CFC’s President and CEO.. “Canadian community foundations urge our partners - business, governments, other organizations and individuals – to use our *Vital Signs* reports as a catalyst for action.”

Canada’s Vital Signs 2008 is part of a growing nation-wide initiative by Canadian community foundations to measure quality of life and take action to improve it. Today, 15 local *Vital Signs* report cards are being released by community foundations across Canada. This is an increase from 11 reports issued last year and six produced in 2006. As a result of the Canadian initiative, community organizations in Australia and Brazil are also researching similar reports.

Community foundations participating in *Vital Signs 2008* include:

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| • Calgary | • London and | • Toronto |
| • Fredericton | Middlesex | • Victoria |
| • Greater Montreal | • Medicine Hat | • Waterloo Region |
| • Greater Saint John | • Metro Vancouver | |
| • Greater Sudbury | • Oakville | |
| • Guelph & Wellington | • Ottawa | |
| | • Red Deer | |

The reader-friendly report cards track and grade each community’s quality of life in key areas such as the gap between rich and poor, health, housing, and the environment – transforming facts and figures into research that is easily understood. The effort is coordinated by CFC, the membership organization for the country’s 164 community foundations, which produces *Canada’s Vital Signs*.

“*Vital Signs* provides individuals and organizations with a focus for improving quality of life in their communities,” said Vincenza Travale, Chair of CFC’s Board of Directors. “It’s clear that the *Vital Signs* program is becoming an increasingly important catalyst for change at the both local and national levels.”

For example:

- When its *Vital Signs* report indicated a local obesity rate higher than the national average, the Greater Saint John Community Foundation committed itself to encouraging physical activity. The Foundation is helping to build a new running track, scheduled to open this fall, for walkers, joggers and active residents of all ages in the Greater River Valley area.
- In Victoria, B.C., students at Oak Bay High School were struck by data on homelessness and the shortage of basic hygiene supplies reported in *Victoria’s Vital Signs*. Working with local hotels and businesses, students collected boxes of soap, shampoo and body wash which they assembled into kits for downtown shelters and street outreach programs.

Canada's Vital Signs

CFC's *Canada's Vital Signs* looks at the 10 indicators shared by every community foundation issuing a report this year. It collates data from a number of recognized sources to provide an overview and make connections between key quality of life issues in our country. It is designed to share important research in a reader-friendly way that is accessible to all Canadians. It is based on *Toronto's Vital Signs®*, a successful report developed by Toronto Community Foundation first published in 2001.

Canada's Vital Signs 2008 will be distributed across Canada in The Globe and Mail on October 16, 2008 and will be available as a downloadable file at www.cfc-fcc.ca.

CFC recognizes the generous support of **Mackenzie Investments** as Canada's Vital Signs 2008 National Sponsor.

About Canada's community foundations

Community foundations build and manage permanent endowments, using their knowledge of their communities' needs to connect donors to the causes and organizations that can help them make a lasting difference. With more than \$2.9 billion in assets, the community foundation movement is one of Canada's largest grantmakers, providing more than \$176 million in grants last year to thousands of charities.

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Note to editors/producers: See attached backgrounder for more findings from Canada's Vital Signs 2008.

All 15 local *Vital Signs* reports and media contacts for participating community foundations can be found at www.vitalsignscanada.ca.

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Canada's Vital Signs 2008: Key Findings

- **Canada is making progress, but not enough, to eliminate child poverty.**
In 2006, 1.6 million Canadian children - more than one in five (23%) lived in poverty. In 2000, more than one in four children (26%) lived in low-income families. Child poverty in 2006 was at virtually the same level as in 1989, the year when Canada's House of Commons unanimously passed a resolution to eliminate it by the year 2000. At the current rate, it would take 43 more years or until 2050 to eliminate child poverty.
- **Immigrants' incomes are falling farther behind.**
While the median income of non-immigrant Canadian families increased by over 5% from 2000 to 2005, the income of immigrant families fell by 1%. Among recent immigrants (those in Canada less than five years) incomes fell more than 3%.
- **More Canadians are finishing high school, but there are some disturbing gaps.**
In 2007, just over 22% of Canadian adults did not have a high school diploma. This has improved steadily since 1990 when almost 38% had not completed high school. This put Canada third among G8 countries, behind Russia and the United States. However, among Canadians aged 25-44, the share of men without a high school education (11%) is markedly higher than that of women (8%). And in 2006, 43.7 per cent of aboriginal people did not have a high school diploma.
- **Every year, more Canadians become obese.**
In 2007, 16% of Canadians were obese – a rate that has grown steadily since 1996, when the obesity rate was 12%. (Obesity defined as adult body mass index 30 or higher)
- **It's estimated that 21,000 Canadians will die from the effects of air pollution this year.**
Air quality is worst in central Canada (Ontario and Quebec) where communities report the most days with concentrations of ground-level ozone and tiny particulate matter exceeding Canada-wide standards.

- **Although Canadians are driving more, our roads are getting safer.**
Traffic crime (Criminal Code offences such as impaired or dangerous driving) rates have fallen steadily over the past 15 years and are now less than half of what they were in 1991. In 2007, there were 400 criminal code traffic offences per 100,000 people, down from 806 in 1991.
- **Employment grew over the past five years, especially in the West.**
The 2000 to 2007 period saw an average annual employment growth of 1.92 per cent across the country. Strong economies in Alberta and British Columbia fuelled very strong growth while other regions experienced more modest growth.
- **In some communities, a vacant apartment can be very hard to find.**
While in 2007 the national vacancy rate averages around 2.5%, it's less than 0.5% in Sudbury, Lethbridge and Victoria.
- **Canadians are showing increasing interest in the arts.**
About 41% of Canadian adults reported attending a live arts performance in 2005, up from 38% in 1998.
- **Participation rates in democracy and elections are declining. Even in communities with the highest turnout, over a quarter of Canada's listed voters don't show – in some communities it's closer to half.**
Just over 64% of listed voters cast a ballot in the last federal election (2006), continuing a declining trend in voter turnout that began in the 1990s. Previously, federal elections dating back to 1962 routinely saw voter turnout rates in the range of 70% to 80%. Among Vital Signs communities in 2006, Oakville (Ontario) led participation at 74% while Medicine Hat (Alberta) trailed at 56%.