

CALGARY'S AGING POPULATION

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHANGING AND AGING POPULATION IN CALGARY

Calgary's population is growing and changing rapidly. Of all the major cities in Canada, Calgary has the youngest population¹. However, as is the case in much of the western world, Calgary is experiencing the overall aging of its population. As a city, we are living longer and having fewer children and this is influencing the demographic makeup of the population. Adding pressure is the aging of the baby boomer generation, those born between 1946 and 1965, the oldest of whom are entering their senior years starting in 2011. Certain opportunities and challenges accompany this demographic shift. This document provides a brief overview of seniors (age 65+) and the aging population in Calgary.

2011

The year the first baby boomers turn 65

A City Coming of Age

The senior population is growing at a pace never seen before in Calgary. With 10 per cent of the population currently aged 65+ (2011), the projected increase over the next 10 years will see this share rise to almost 15 per cent². This is a dramatic change, considering it took over 70 years for the share of the senior population to grow from 5 per cent to today's 10 per cent (see Chart 1).

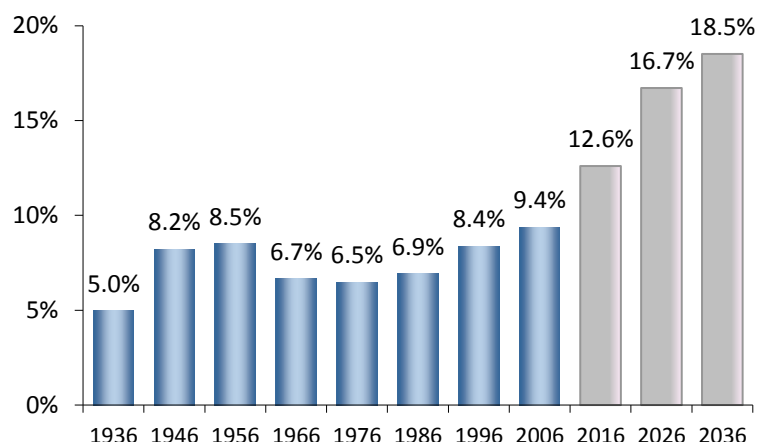
At the time of the latest Federal Census in 2006, the median age in Calgary was **35.7** years old. In comparison, the median age across Canada was **39.5** years old.

Calgary is currently on the edge of a rising tide of seniors. The increasingly diverse nature of older adults will impact our communities and challenge the way many services are delivered in our city. The aging population will impact the labour force, financial system, housing sector, health services and supports, community-based supports, transportation, and the ways that business, charities, and governments interact with society³.

The increasing number of older adults is moving aging-related issues to the top of the policy agenda locally, nationally, and globally.

Chart 1: This chart highlights the striking difference between the historically slow climb in the proportion of seniors, and the rapidly rising projected trend that Calgary is currently facing.

Chart 1: Percentage of Calgarians comprised of persons aged 65 or older, 1936 to 2036



Source: Statistics Canada, Censuses of Canada, 1936-2006; City of Calgary, Corporate Economics, 2007

Increasing Momentum

updated with 2011 Civic Census results

The first wave of baby boomers turn age 65 in 2011. This begins a large upward swell in the older age cohorts in Calgary. There are currently approximately 250,000⁴ baby boomers in Calgary.

- Looking ahead as the baby boom population grows older, the rate of growth in the senior population is relentless, growing by major increments every 5 years (see Table 1). There will be a 25 per cent growth in all seniors between 2011 and 2016. In the very oldest cohort, age 75+, there will be a 16 per cent growth between 2011 and 2016.
- Between 2011 and 2021 the total population of Calgary is expected to climb from 1,090,936 to approximately 1,301,800. This is a 19 per cent increase. Comparatively, during this decade there will be a 56 per cent increase in seniors (age 65+) in Calgary, growing from 106,515 today to about 166,000 seniors in 2020. This amounts to three times the growth rate in the total population.
- By the mid 2020s, the senior population in Calgary will essentially have doubled today's population of seniors.
- Today, about one in 10 Calgarians are seniors. By 2026, this will rise to one in six. By 2036, almost one in five Calgarians will be seniors.



Senior?

The term *senior* traditionally refers to people who are over the age of 65. The baby boomer generation tends to prefer different terms such as *older adult* over *senior*. Increasingly, these terms are used interchangeably.

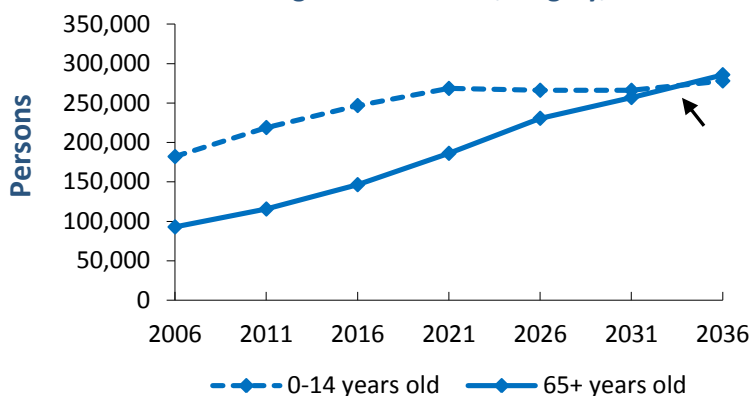
Table 1: Current and projected numbers of seniors in Calgary^{2,4}

	2011 ⁴	2016 (projected)	2021 (projected)	Percentage Change (projected)	
				2011 - 2016	2011 - 2021
All 65+	106,515	133,100	166,000	25.0%	55.8%
Age 75+	46,857	54,300	66,000	15.9%	40.1%
Total population	1,090,936	1,206,300	1,301,800	10.6%	19.3%

Source: City of Calgary, 2011 Civic Census. City of Calgary, Corporate Economics, Population Projections, 2011.

Changing Times

Chart 2: Number of persons aged 0 - 14 years compared to those aged 65 and older, Calgary, 2006 to 2036



Source: City of Calgary, Corporate Economics, 2007

In the early 2030s, the number of adults aged 65+ will surpass the number of children aged 14 and under in Calgary (see Chart 2). This will mark the first time in history that Calgary has more seniors than children – a significant milestone marking the demographic shift sweeping all of Canada.

The next generation of seniors will be a more diverse cohort of older adults than any other previous generation. In general, this cohort of older adults will:

- Have a higher education than previous generations
- Experience better health and will live longer than previous older adults
- Have greater income and savings than previous seniors¹
- Be more culturally diverse on the whole. In 2001, 14% of seniors were visible minorities, and in 2006, this number rose to 17% of seniors and will continue to rise⁵
- Have higher expectations of products and services
- Be more technologically savvy

Challenge

Services and programs that serve seniors are faced with the challenge of continuing to address the needs of current seniors, while at the same time **evolving** to accommodate the changing nature and needs of the growing older adult population.

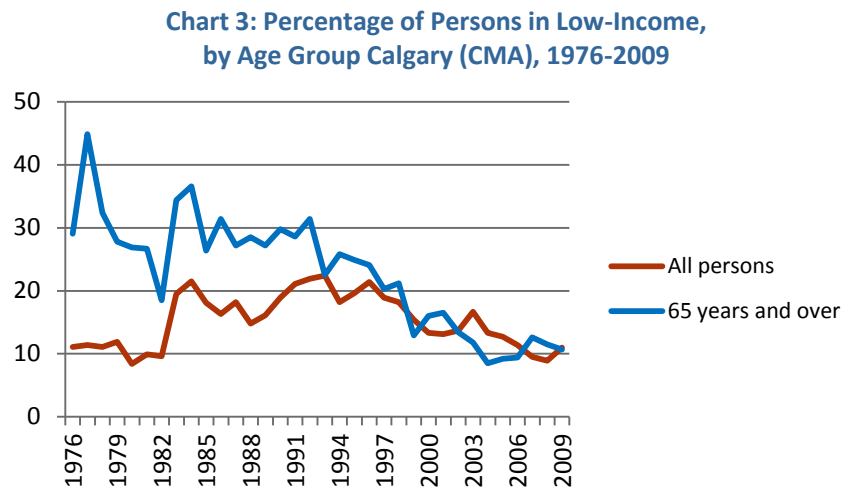
Staying Active and Involved

Staying involved in one's community while growing older is part of healthy aging. A community that supports older adults in staying as healthy and active as possible for as long as possible encourages greater social inclusion.⁶

- Participation in social, leisure, and spiritual activities in the community allows older people to continue to exercise their competence and also maintain or establish supportive relationships.
- Inclusive programming and inter-generational opportunities that are based close to where seniors live may be more appealing to some older adults.
- Strategies that encourage older adults to be involved in their local communities through volunteering or flexible paid work are needed. Some service providers may lose their volunteer base unless they provide new and flexible opportunities for older adults.

Seniors Income Security

Improvement in poverty levels among seniors over the past few decades have been substantial. In the 1970s, poverty rates among Calgary seniors were much higher than other age groups. Today, it is more on par with other age groups (see Chart 3). In addition, many next-generation seniors will have more income from savings and investments than the generations that preceded them.



Source: Statistics Canada. Income Trends 1976-2009.⁷

However, a significant portion of the senior population will remain in poverty. As the total senior population grows, the number of seniors living in low-income situations will also grow.

- About 14.6% of seniors lived below the before tax low-income cut-off (LICO) in 2005 (about 13,000 seniors). This is comparable with the rate for Calgary's total population (14.2% lived below LICO in 2005)⁵.
- Almost 40% of unattached seniors live in poverty⁵.
- Almost 26% of Calgary seniors indicate that it is difficult to afford the food they need because of increases in housing costs⁸.

41.8%

of unattached female seniors live in poverty. These individuals are at greater risk of being socially isolated⁵.

Social Isolation

Preventing and addressing social isolation in seniors is a growing area of concern. Seniors with limited financial resources are at risk of being socially isolated because they often can't afford essentials like transportation, program fees, or even professional assistance they may need. Those who live alone are particularly at risk.

Risk factors that increase the chances of seniors becoming socially isolated include:

- older age (75+)
- living on a low-income
- living alone
- health/mobility difficulties
- language or cultural barriers

In Calgary, about eight per cent of seniors don't speak English or French at a conversational level, which may impact their ability to access services and participate in their communities⁵.



Housing and Community Living

Generally speaking, older adults want to *age in place*. This means they want to stay in the communities, if not the homes, they have lived in for years. Living in a setting that matches a senior's level of need, mobility, and care is important for their safety, dignity, and quality of life. Choice about where to live is affected by several factors including cost and location of housing, the level of care or support a person requires, changing needs associated with aging, lifestyle preferences, transportation needs, and the diversity of housing options available³. The City of Calgary's Municipal Development Plan promotes complete communities that are highly beneficial to all ages and are particularly conducive to an aging population⁹.

aging in place

- ✓ Affordable, accessible transportation and housing within complete communities
- ✓ Housing diversity
- ✓ Access to practical amenities
- ✓ Coordinated home services such as home (health) care and social services
- ✓ Services and funding related to home maintenance
- ✓ Access to coordinated information on services and programs

Complete communities have:

- A mix of different types of housing that suit all ages
- A more compact settlement pattern
- More local jobs, retail and public spaces in accessible destinations
- A variety of transportation options

age friendly

An "age-friendly" city encourages active aging by optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.

The Age-Friendly Cities Guidebook provides advice on how cities and communities can become more age-friendly in eight particular areas:

1. outdoor spaces/buildings
2. transportation
3. housing
4. social participation
5. respect/social inclusion
6. civic participation and employment
7. communication and information
8. community and health supports.

World Health Organization
Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide
www.who.int/aging

Accessible?

Many older adults require supportive environments that compensate for changes associated with aging. As the population ages, addressing accessibility for people with physical, visual, hearing, and/or cognitive disabilities is of growing importance to allowing people to age in place, while remaining actively involved in their communities.

The World Health Organization identifies features of an age-friendly city that make a community accessible for all people. Examples include use of ramps, wider doorways, non-slip flooring, and rest areas with ample public seating, clear sidewalks, and accessible public toilets, to name a few. An age-friendly city adjusts its structures and services to be accessible to, and inclusive of, older individuals.

Looking Ahead

Planning for an aging population requires cross-sector collaboration and strategic planning. Ensuring that the needs of the growing population of seniors are met will involve support from all levels of government, community organizations, and community members including seniors themselves. Services that are geared specifically towards seniors will notice mounting pressure that matches the rising trend in the aging demographic. However, this demographic shift will also affect services and structures that are available to Calgarians of all ages. Engaging older adults in discussions about their needs and preferences going forward will be imperative to planning communities, services, programs, and urban structures that are suitable and supportive to an aging population.

“The huge baby boom generation, which has transformed public and private institutions throughout its life course thus far, is poised to change our communities once again.”¹⁰



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¹ Statistics Canada (2006). Portrait of Seniors. Catalogue no. 89-519-XIE

² All projection data in this report are based on calculations by The City of Calgary Corporate Economics, 2007 and 2011

³ Government of Alberta (2010). *Aging Policy Framework*. www.seniors.alberta.ca

⁴ City of Calgary (2011). City of Calgary Civic Census. www.calgary.ca

⁵ Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population. www.statcan.gc.ca

⁶ World Health Organization (2007). *Global age-friendly cities: A guide*. www.who.int/aging

⁷ Statistics Canada. Income Trends 1976-2008. Table 202-0802, last updated: 2010-12-07

⁸ City of Calgary (2008). *Survey on Seniors' Decision to Relocate*. www.calgary.ca/cns

⁹ City of Calgary website www.calgary.ca/planit

¹⁰ Scharlach, A. (2009). Creating aging-friendly communities. *Journal of the American Society on Aging*. Summer 2009. Vol. 33 No.2