



CPRN RCRPP

Quality of Life in Canada: A Citizens' Report Card

Background Report

Prepared by Joseph H. Michalski, Ph.D.

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for Canadian Policy Research Networks

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Foreword

Canadians are continually bombarded with information about economic, social, environmental and political trends in Canada — stock prices, unemployment rates, air quality and income inequality — to name a few. Reports and results come hourly, daily, quarterly, annually. Even when lined up and looked at together, these separate snapshots do not provide a comprehensive portrait of the quality of life in Canada.

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) has undertaken to prepare a complete picture. With its partners, CPRN has created a quality of life report card for the 1990s based on what matters most to citizens. A CPRN-led process of public dialogue (including 40 dialogue sessions with 350 Canadians from all walks of life) resulted in a clear picture of what Canadians believe should be included in a national portrait of our quality of life. Citizens offered a framework that includes 40 indicators of quality of life, grouped into nine themes: democratic rights and participation; health; education; environment; social programs and conditions; community; personal well-being; economy and employment; and government.

This background report provides the detailed results of subsequent research to find out just how the Canadian population has fared, primarily through the 1990s, with respect to each of the 40 indicators of quality of life identified in the dialogue process. The results show clear improvements on some fronts and negative change on others — while in some cases, the situation remains more or less the same in 2000 as it was in 1990. On the whole? Readers can decide for themselves whether the glass is half full or half empty.

It also serves as the basis for a shorter overview report, which provides snapshots of progress (or lack thereof) within each theme. Both reports join a series of earlier discussion papers produced as part of CPRN's Quality of Life Indicators Project, and posted on the CPRN website (www.cprn.org). The shorter overview report is also available in print (*Quality of Life in Canada: A Citizens' Report*).

I want to thank Joseph H. Michalski, Department of Sociology, Trent University, for the preparation of this discussion paper and for his steadfast collaboration and contributions to the Quality of Life Indicators Project. I also want to acknowledge the contribution of Allium Consulting Group Inc. for their communications expertise. CPRN is grateful to participants in the October 2000 cross-Canada dialogue groups for their work and insights. After all, it is their input that provided the basis for the prototype set of national quality of life indicators, on which this report card is based.

The final word of appreciation goes to our funders, who include The Atkinson Charitable Foundation, the Treasury Board Secretariat and Health Canada.

Judith Maxwell
President
Canadian Policy Research Networks

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I Introduction

Background

In 1990, the United Nations published the first *Human Development Report*, which annually has included comparative rankings of countries worldwide based on the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI provides an aggregate index of human well-being and ranks nations according to their citizens' quality of life, rather than strictly by a nation's traditional economic figures. For several years during the 1990s, Canada received the number one ranking in the world, based on the HDI composite measure (United Nations Development Programme 2001a). In the latest ranking, however, Canada has slipped to third place (United Nations Development Programme 2001b).

Yet, even as Canada earned a series of number one rankings, a certain uneasiness or perhaps even doubt about such a lofty status appeared to trouble the collective conscience of the nation. While Canadians have quietly expressed great pride in their country, many simply could not shake the notion that the quality of life in Canada could be better. The survey data from a 1998 EKOS poll, for example, determined that about one third of Canadians believed "the overall quality of life of Canadians compared to residents of other countries" had deteriorated over the past five years, while another third believed things had "stayed the same" (Mendelsohn 2000).

The great irony of the HDI rankings, then, might be the fact that Canadians responded with even *more* critical self-reflection. While concerns about the quality of life in Canada have continued unabated, the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) has weighed in with an ambitious initiative to track the quality of life in Canada. Over the past two years, CPRN has worked with a broad cross-section of organizations interested in developing a prototype set of national indicators to monitor quality of life issues. An integral component of the process has been CPRN's launch of a series of public dialogues designed to engage Canadians in discussions about what should be included in such a national indicator system. The current report offers the first attempt to develop a Canadian quality of life report card based on the preferences and values expressed by Canadians in those public dialogue discussions (Michalski 2001).

Quality of Life — An Evolving Concept

In recent years, the standard measures of progress — such as economic growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita — increasingly have been challenged as inadequate to capture fully or accurately the state of well-being or quality of life in society (cf. Anielski 2001). While the traditional measures of economic growth continue to be important benchmarks for economists to model certain types of economic behaviour, several analysts have attempted to utilize the tools of the social sciences to develop alternative accounting systems. For example, the HDI measures "progress" through a composite index with three main components: the standard of living (GDP per capita and income above the low income cut-offs), educational attainment (adult literacy and years of schooling), and longevity or life expectancy.

One of the more important conceptual shifts has been the emergence of the paradigm of “genuine progress.” The main idea consists of re-examining economic progress in the context of what many analysts refer to as “sustainable development,” or an attempt to balance economic well-being with environmental and social well-being. In 1995, Redefining Progress developed an alternative measure of progress — the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). The GPI builds upon the original Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (Cobb and Cobb 1994; Daly and Cobb 1994). According to the Redefining Progress website (<http://www.rprogress.org/projects/gpi>), “the GPI starts with the same accounting framework as the GDP, but then makes some crucial distinctions: It adds in the economic contributions of household and volunteer work, but subtracts factors such as crime, pollution, and family breakdown.” These ideas have flourished over the past decade. Redefining Progress estimates that more than 200 communities in the United States alone have developed sets of indicators to monitor their economic, environmental and social well-being and to assist in charting new futures.

In Canada, GPI Atlantic (2001b) has applied that logic in an effort to develop an index of sustainable development and well-being, using Nova Scotia as their central test case. Accordingly, the Nova Scotia GPI consists of 22 distinct social, economic and environmental resource types grouped under five broad thematic areas: time use, natural capital, environment/quality, socioeconomic and social capital. Wilson (2001) has applied the index to determine the “ecological footprint” for Nova Scotia, which includes both measures of supply (what we produce) and demand (what we consume) to produce a more comprehensive measure of sustainability. As Wilson (2001, 2) has written:

“How we eat, shop, travel, use energy and build our houses directly impacts the environment. Almost everything we do consumes natural resources and produces waste. Our ecological footprint is the amount of space we take up, or the amount of land and sea area it takes to meet our current levels of consumption. It tells us what impact our consumption patterns have on the environment and whether we are exceeding the capacity of the environment to satisfy our wants.”

Several other measurement projects have been developed and implemented in recent years, typically at the provincial and municipal levels. At the federal level, the Treasury Board of Canada (2001) has published a series of annual reports (most recently *Canada's Performance 2001*), which are submitted to Parliament for discussion and debate. The reports mainly attempt to document government departmental performance in concert with jurisdictional and, for the first time in 2001, national level performance indicators intended to assess Canada's societal progress. The analytic framework contains 19 societal indicators organized around four themes: the health of Canadians, the environment, the strength of communities, and economic opportunities and innovation.

Several government and non-profit organizations have developed measurement systems that capture various dynamics or dimensions of quality of life in Canada as well. For example, the Canadian Council on Social Development has produced *The Personal Security Index*, which focuses on economic security, health security and physical safety (Schetagne, Jackson and Harman 2001). Other groups currently developing or exploring the possibility of new measures include the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, the Centre for the

Study of Living Standards Index of Wellbeing, and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (see Legowski 2001).

At the provincial level, perhaps the most ambitious effort to date stems from the Pembina Institute's recent initiative entitled *Alberta Sustainability Trends 2000: The Genuine Progress Indicators Report 1961 to 1999* (Anielski et al. 2001). Their work consists of presenting time series data on 51 indicators covering several core dimensions of quality of life intended to reflect "genuine progress." Shookner's (2000) study of the Quality of Life in Ontario bases the indicator system on research dealing with quality of life issues, the determinants of health, sustainable development, and human and social development. The system examines three indicators each to monitor social, economic, health and environmental trends in Ontario over time, with reference to the benchmark year of 1990, wherein the index peaked at 100. By comparison, the composite index declined somewhat to a rating of 97.7 in the Spring of 2000. Other provinces and territories with initiatives currently in progress include British Columbia, Newfoundland, Québec and Yukon (Legowski 2001).

A plethora of community initiatives currently exists in Canada, several of which are described under the link to "Sustainable Communities and Economic Policy" in the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) website (<http://www.fcm.ca/scep/>), as well as through the GPI Atlantic website (<http://www.gpiatlantic.org/realitycheck/partners>). The FCM (2001) has engaged in the development of an ambitious *Quality of Life Reporting System* that presently involves 18 different sites. The system includes ten sets of indicators in total (eight of which have been fully reported), each having roughly five different measures.

Finally, there is the new quarterly *Reality Check: The Canadian Review of Wellbeing*, edited by GPI Atlantic's Dr. Ron Colman and launched by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation in November 2001. *Reality Check* is designed to foster dialogue regarding a Canadian Index of Wellbeing and report on important indicator work and new initiatives taking place in Canada.

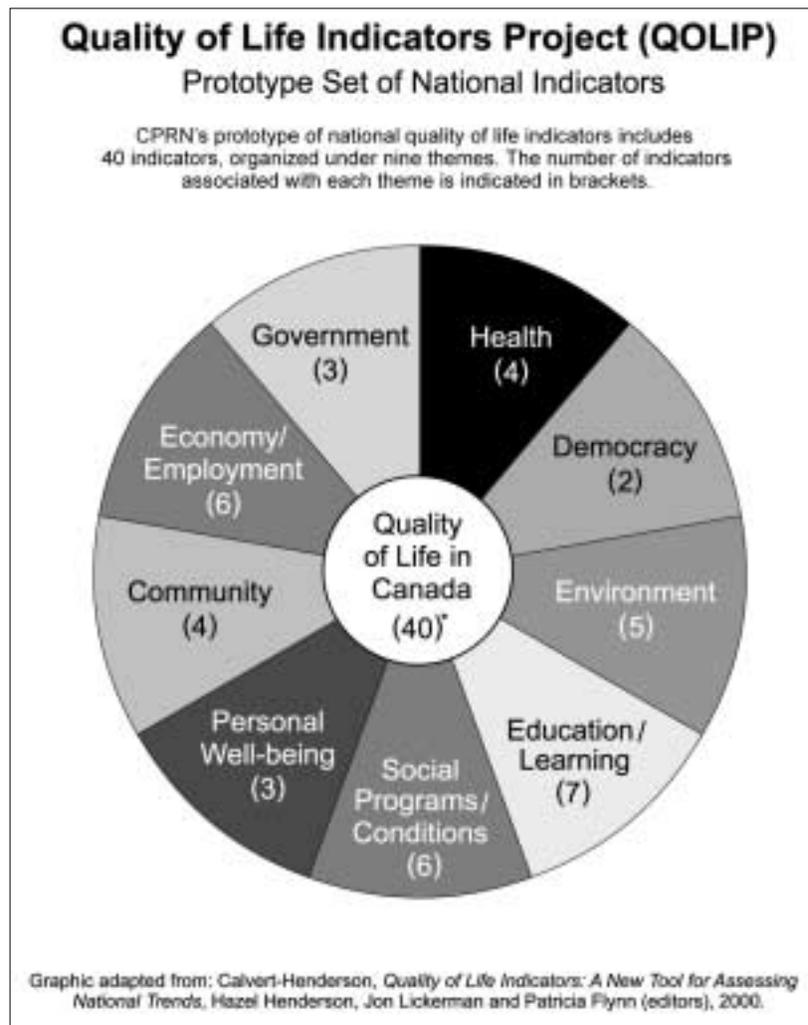
A National Citizen-Oriented Approach

While the various quality of life initiatives continue to multiply, the question of which aspects of well-being should be monitored remains a flashpoint of controversy. The selection of indicators and measures can readily provoke disagreements among experts and the general public alike. Some have reasoned, however, that to be legitimate, societal indicators should reflect what matters most to the members of a community or a nation. As Judith Maxwell, President of CPRN, has stated, "While much activity is under way in Canada on quality of life indicators, until now there has been no initiative of a national scope that seeks input from citizens" (quoted in Michalski 2001, iii).

As a consequence, CPRN has proceeded to adopt just such an approach: consult the public to determine their core values and what matters most to Canadians in terms of monitoring the quality of life in the country. Under the direction of Sandra Zagon, CPRN Project Manager, 40 dialogue discussions were organized, with nearly 350 participants in nine provinces across Canada over a two-week period in October 2000. The participants reviewed background materials on quality of life issues and indicators, engaged in three-hour dialogue discussions

facilitated by trained moderators, and completed questionnaires before and after their discussions. The groups identified their priorities for quality of life. These have been reported in detail in Michalski's summary analysis (2001) and serve as the basis for the current reporting system.

Drawing upon the public dialogue results, CPRN held two workshops in mid-December 2000 to bring together a select group of citizens with indicator practitioners/experts and Steering Committee members to develop the criteria for selecting a manageable number of national quality of life indicators (CPRN 2001). A draft prototype was developed accordingly and then distributed for further validation to a sample of citizens who participated in the October dialogues. The resulting prototype reflects both the recommendations of the citizen dialogue groups and existing knowledge in the area to help guide best practices and further research. The prototype includes nine thematic areas and a total of 40 national indicators (see diagram below). Some of the data for the indicators are weak and, in a few cases, no data are available. With research, however, these weaknesses should be overcome.



The prototype set of national indicators consists of nine interconnected and overlapping themes or elements which, taken together, form a comprehensive picture of what Canadians consider important to their quality of life. The nine themes and the 40 specific indicators that define them are presented below in the order of priority set by citizens in the public dialogues:

1. Democratic Rights and Participation (two indicators)

- Exercising democratic rights: voter turnout
- Tolerance of diversity

2. Health (four indicators)

- Quality of the health care system
- Physical health status
- Mental health status
- Lifestyle

3. Education/Learning (seven indicators)

- Access to universal primary/secondary education system
- Educational attainment
- Access to post-secondary education: tuition costs as percent of family income
- Participation rates and enrolment
- Access to lifelong learning
- Adult literacy rates
- Child/youth literacy rates

4. Environment (five indicators)

- Air quality
- Water quality
- Waste management
- Resources devoted to developing renewable energy sources
- Access to clean, healthy public outdoor green spaces

5. Social Programs and Conditions (six indicators)

- Low income rates
- Adequacy of income supports in meeting basic needs
- Availability and affordability of child care
- Living wages
- Food bank usage
- Affordability of housing

6. Community (four indicators)

- Satisfaction with police, courts, prison and parole systems
- Sense of personal safety and changes in crime rates
- Level of civic involvement
- Availability of programs and services

7. Personal Well-Being (three indicators)

- Personal time stress or control over time
- Degree of social interaction, intimate connections and social isolation
- Sense of personal financial security

8. Economy and Employment (six indicators)

- Unemployment and labour force participation rates
- Percentage of involuntary part-time workers
- Job security, satisfaction and working conditions
- Bankruptcies (personal and business)
- Income/wealth distribution
- Consumer debt levels

9. Government (three indicators)

- Level of public trust
- Accountability/stewardship of public values and funds
- Public governance

II Report Card Thematic Results

About This Report

This report elaborates upon each of the nine themes and indicators by drawing upon a diverse range of data sources to provide actual measures of each at the national level. The data typically derive from the best known and most reliable sources or national surveys. In most cases, the indicators include at least one measure from the most recent year available, as well as a comparison or baseline year from the early 1990s. The intent will be to refine the quality of life report card in the years ahead, based on the feasibility of collecting certain types of data and through further efforts to track the core values and preferences of Canadian citizens.

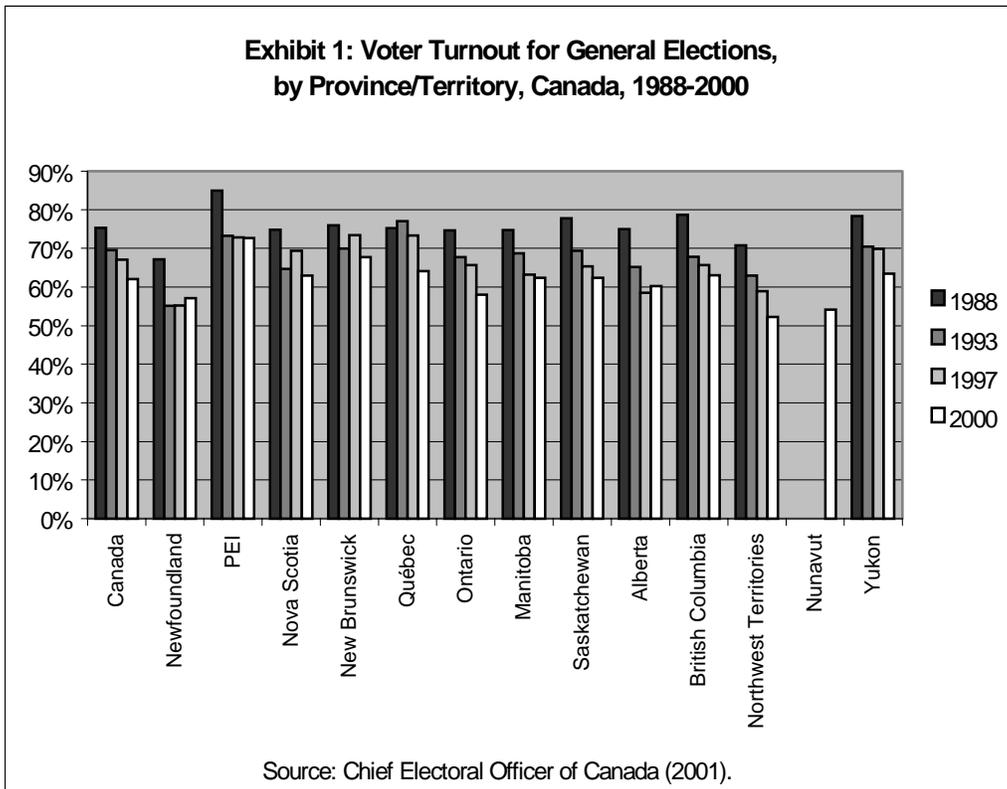
1. Democratic Rights and Participation

Most Canadians view the ability to exercise their democratic rights as a cornerstone to a healthy quality of life. Each of the 40 public dialogue groups discussed various aspects of democratic participation and the protection of basic civil and human rights. To assess the current state of democracy in Canada, two measures have been selected:

- voting patterns
- tolerance of diversity

Voting Patterns

The trend data describing voting activity patterns indicate a steady decline in national participation rates in general elections from 1988-2000. While 75 percent of eligible Canadian voters participated in the 1988 general election, the figures declined for each successive election, reaching a low of 62 percent in 2000. With the exception of New Brunswick, each province and territory witnessed at least a 10-point decline in participation rates through the 1990s. The voter turnout rates were highest in the provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. In contrast, the rates were less than 60 percent in several jurisdictions, including Ontario for the first time in 2000.



The Bottom Line: Democratic participation has been declining for more than a decade across Canada, at least as is measured by voting patterns.

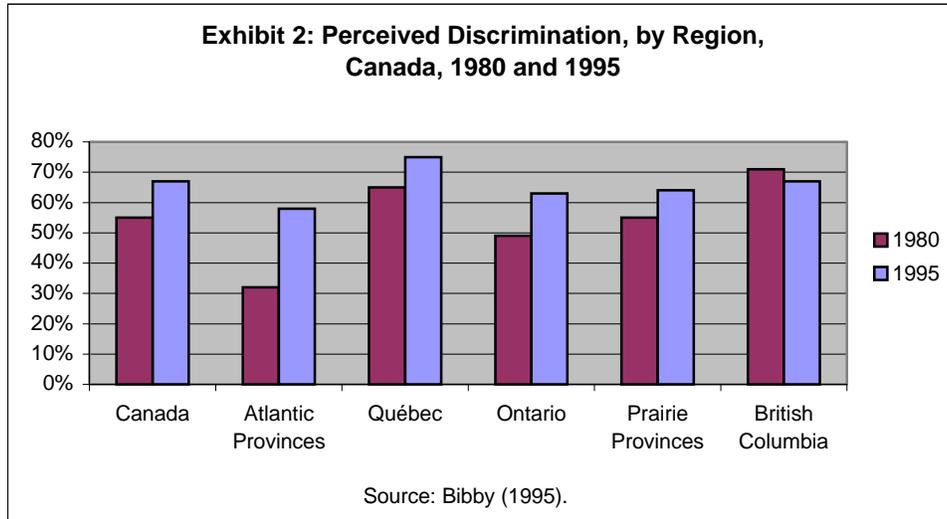
Tolerance of Diversity

Canadians often express pride in the multicultural nature of their society. Arguably, the tolerance of diversity helps to define Canada’s national character. In surveys conducted by Decima Research across the country during the mid-1990s, two thirds of Canadians agreed or strongly agreed that “one of the best things about Canada is our acceptance of people from all races and backgrounds” (Canadian Council of Christians and Jews 1995).

The ability of different ethnic and religious groups to participate fully and without prejudice represents another aspect of the democratic principles endorsed by Canada. At the same time, however, seven in ten Canadians consider racism to be somewhat of a serious problem. In recent years, the proportion of responses agreeing with the question “Do you feel that any racial or cultural groups in your community are discriminated against?” has increased. In both 1980 and 1985, about 55 percent of Canadians responded affirmatively to this question. By 1990, this figure had increased to 59 percent, while in 1995 it jumped to 67 percent (Bibby 1995).

These results vary regionally, with the highest proportion of agreement being in Québec, followed by British Columbia, the Prairie provinces, Ontario and the Atlantic provinces. The

Atlantic provinces have witnessed the most dramatic increase in the perception that some groups in their communities experience discrimination.



The Bottom Line: Canadians continue to endorse the principles of multiculturalism, even though there has been an increased perception in recent years that some racial or cultural groups are discriminated against within their communities.

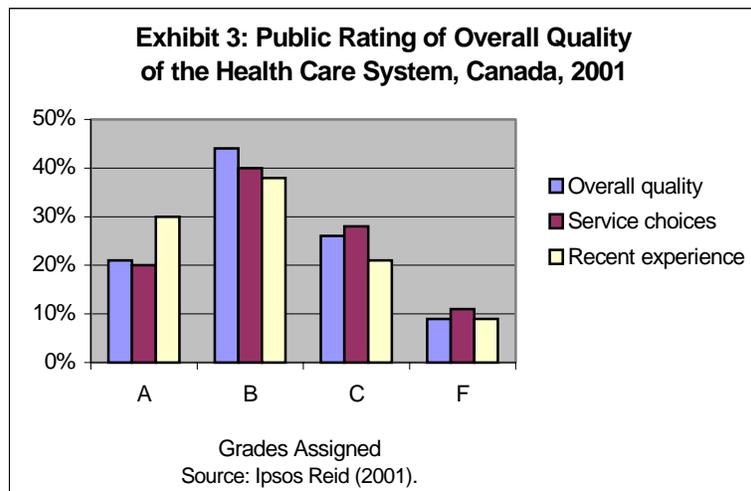
2. Health

Nearly everyone agrees that health status represents a critical component of the quality of life. The broad appeal of health indicators is reflected in the fact that it would be difficult to find *any* quality of life report cards or human development indices that do *not* include health measures. Canadians firmly believe that the health care system plays a vital role in maintaining health. An ongoing debate in recent years has focused on what should be done to sustain a health care system that some Canadians think requires an overhaul. The health measures selected here, therefore, offer a broader evaluation of health consistent with Canadian concerns, as well as those expressed by the dialogue participants. As such, the report card examines four primary health-related indicators:

- quality of the health care system
- physical health status
- mental health status
- lifestyle

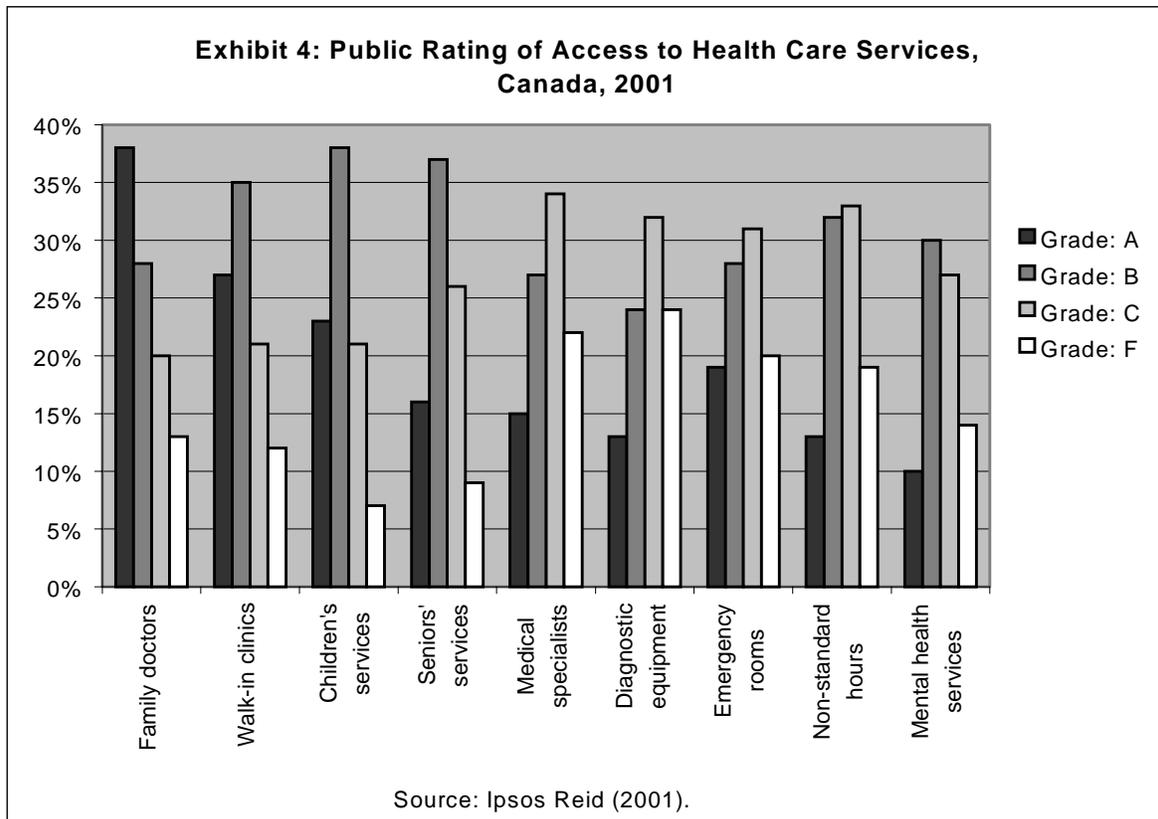
Quality of the Health Care System

Of the four health-related quality of life indicators, the most difficult involves measuring the quality of Canada’s health care system. The Canadian Medical Association recently commissioned Ipsos Reid (2001) to conduct a study of public perceptions of Canada’s health care system using a report card approach.



In the study, Canadians expressed generally favourable views of the health care system within their communities. At least six in ten assigned a grade of “B” or higher for the quality of health care services, the choice of health care services and their most recent experiences with the health care system in their communities. In addition, the majority of Canadians rated access to specific health care services in their community with a “B” grade or better. The highest overall marks

were awarded to access to family doctors and walk-in clinics, followed closely by access to health care services for children.



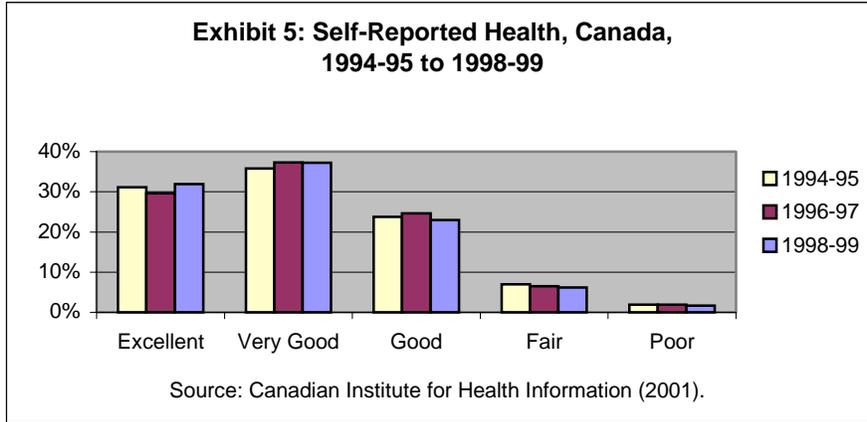
In other areas of access, however, Canadians held much less positive views. The majority rated access to medical specialists, modern diagnostic equipment and emergency room services as a grade “C” or lower. Similarly, access to health care services on evenings or weekends, as well as overall access to mental health services, tended to receive lower ratings.

The Bottom Line: Canadians continue to believe in their health care system, particularly in terms of overall quality, health service options and general access to services. However, the public has a less positive view of access to more specialized services and little confidence in the federal or provincial governments in dealing with the health care system (Ipsos Reid 2001).

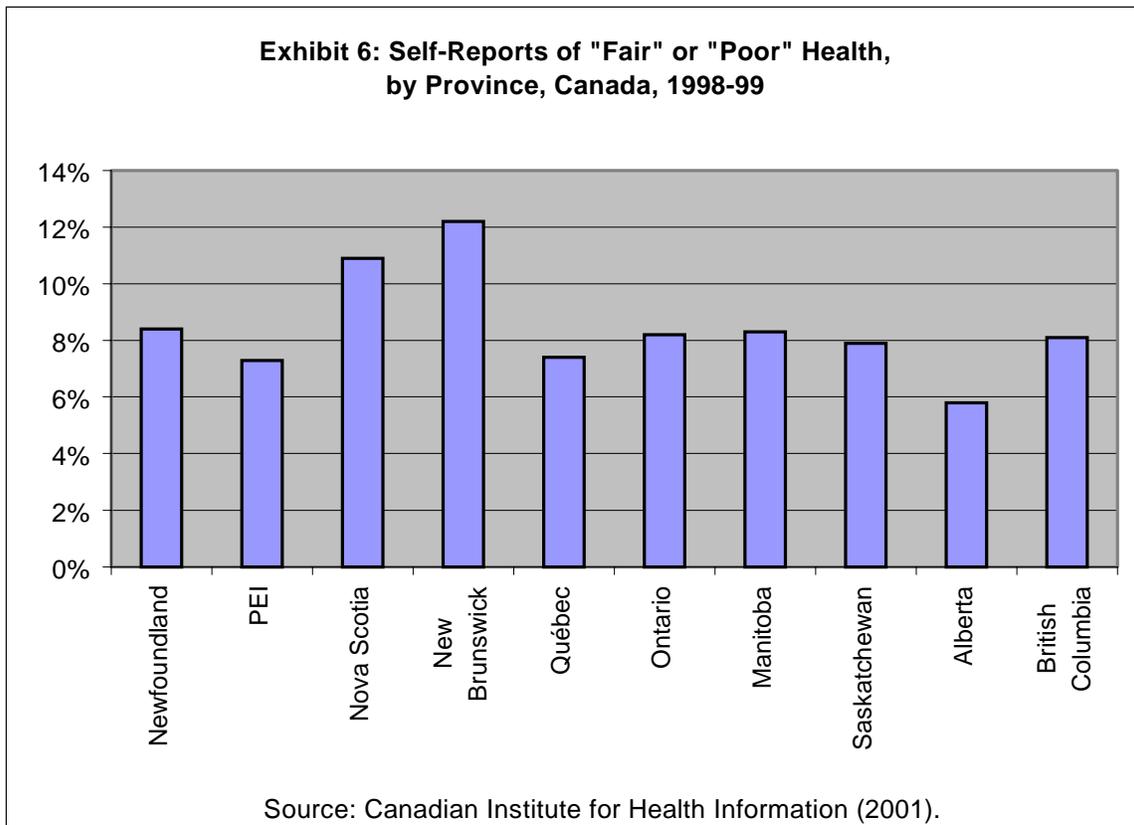
Physical Health Status

The state of physical health has been assessed through two principal measures: self-rated health and life expectancy. The information on self-rated health is derived from the National Population Health Survey (NPHS). The Canadian Institute for Health Information (2001) has provided a summary table that describes the physical health status of Canadians and most of the other relevant health measures.

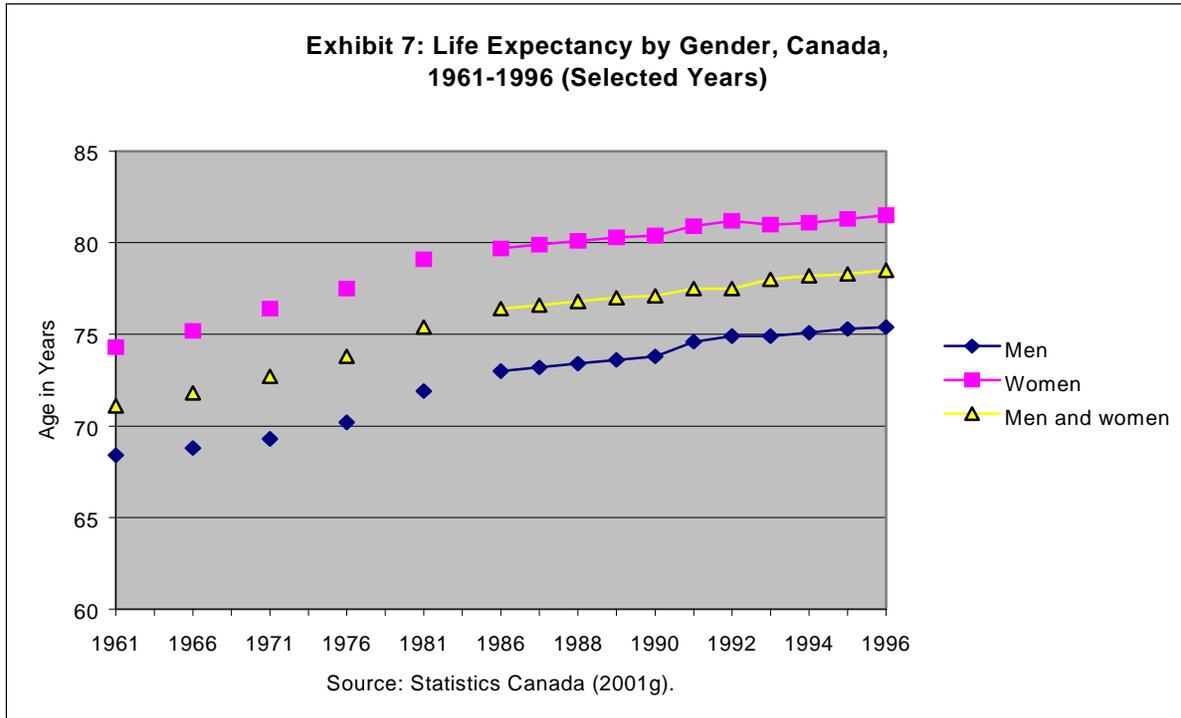
The NPHS data indicate that the self-rated health of Canadians did not change appreciably during the 1990s. More than two thirds reported their health as being either “excellent” or “very good” during each two-year cycle. Roughly 9 percent tended to rate their health as fair or poor. In addition, a slightly higher percentage of men consistently rated their health as excellent or very good in comparison with women.



At the provincial level, the highest overall self-reported health ratings in 1998-99 can be found among residents of Alberta, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island. In contrast, the other two Atlantic provinces reported lower health status: New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were the only two provinces where more than one in ten residents reported either fair or poor health. British Columbia and Saskatchewan were also below the national norms in terms of self-reported health.



On the other hand, the life expectancy data continue to indicate that Canadians are living longer than ever. Throughout the 1990s, life expectancy gains continued to increase, albeit at a slower rate than in previous decades, and less for women than men. By 1997, the overall life expectancy in Canada stood at 78.4 years (Statistics Canada 2001g). That year, the life expectancy for women stood at 81.4 years, while the life expectancy for men had risen to 75.8 years.



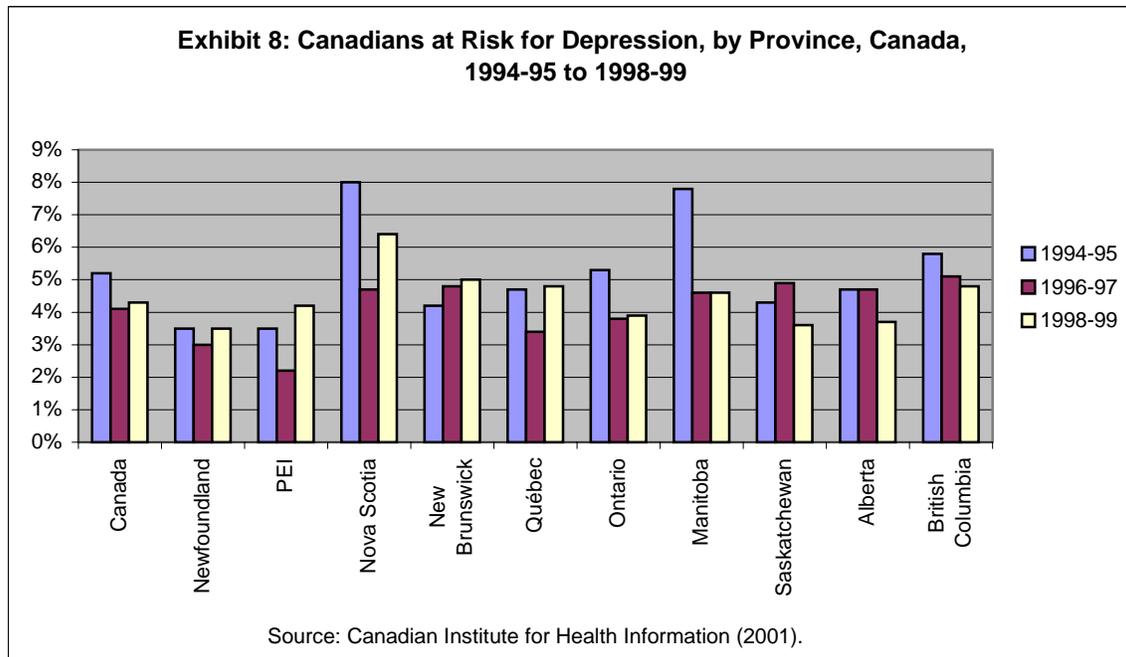
In view of the fact that people survive to more advanced ages where chronic health problems, frailty and functional limitations may restrict their activities, some analysts are beginning to develop alternatives to conventional life expectancy measures. One such measure involves the “disability free life expectancy,” or the number of years that people can expect to live without activity restrictions. By combining information on mortality rates with activity limitation data (1995-97), the evidence suggests that, on average, men can expect to live 65.5 years and women 68.7 years, disability free (Statistics Canada 2001g, 42).

The Bottom Line: The self-reported health data for Canadians remained stable during the 1990s. At least two thirds of Canadians believe their health to be either excellent or very good. The life expectancy measures continue to favour women, but the gender gap has declined in recent years.

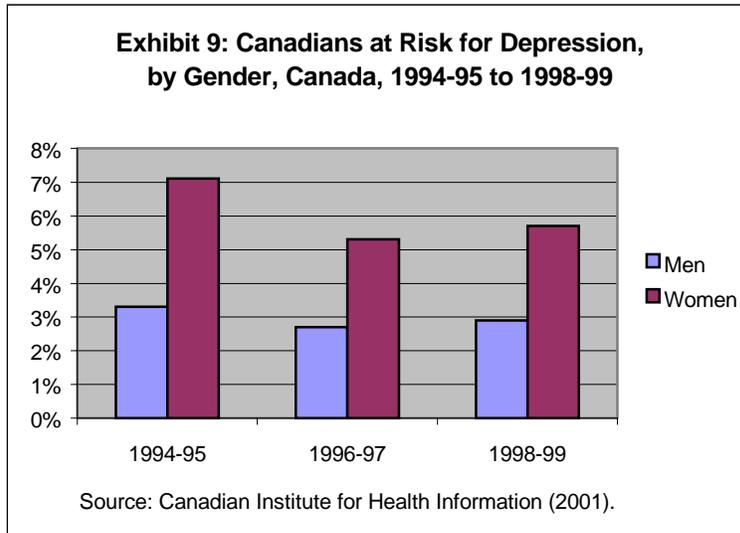
Mental Health Status

Canadians believe that mental health status should be considered as an indicator of quality of life distinct from simply physical health. The challenge, though, is to find an appropriate measure to summarize something as complex as mental health. There are several specific measures used in the National Population Health Survey (NPHS), which includes a series of questions that help to establish the probability of suffering from depression. Nearly everyone has some familiarity with the notion of feeling depressed, which has sometimes been referred to as the “common cold” of mental illness. The measure here examines the prevalence of the more serious forms, referred to as clinical depression, which can be debilitating and/or seriously impede daily functioning.

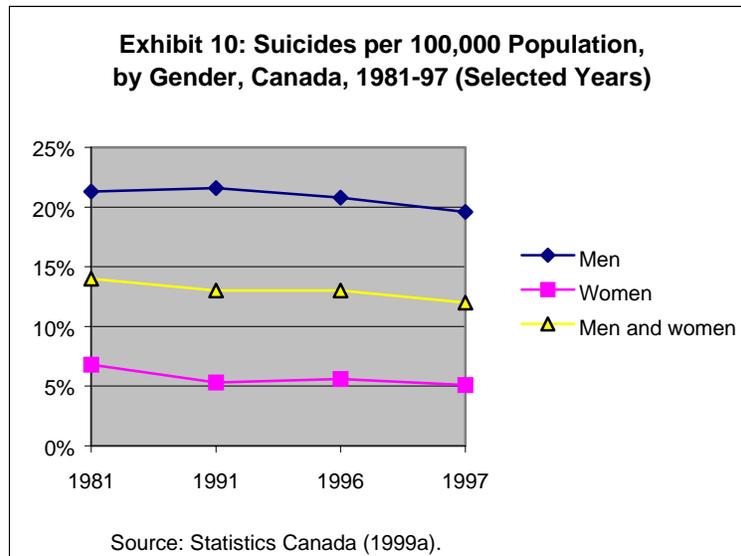
The NPHS data reveal that nearly 1.1 million Canadians, or 4.3 percent of the population aged 12 and older, experienced depressive symptoms in 1998-99. This figure represents a slight decline from the mid-1990s. Between 1994 and 1999 at the provincial level, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and British Columbia have consistently exceeded the national average for risk of depression, while Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island have been below the national average.



Women were roughly twice as likely as men to report suffering from at least one major depressive episode, a pattern which persisted throughout the 1990s.



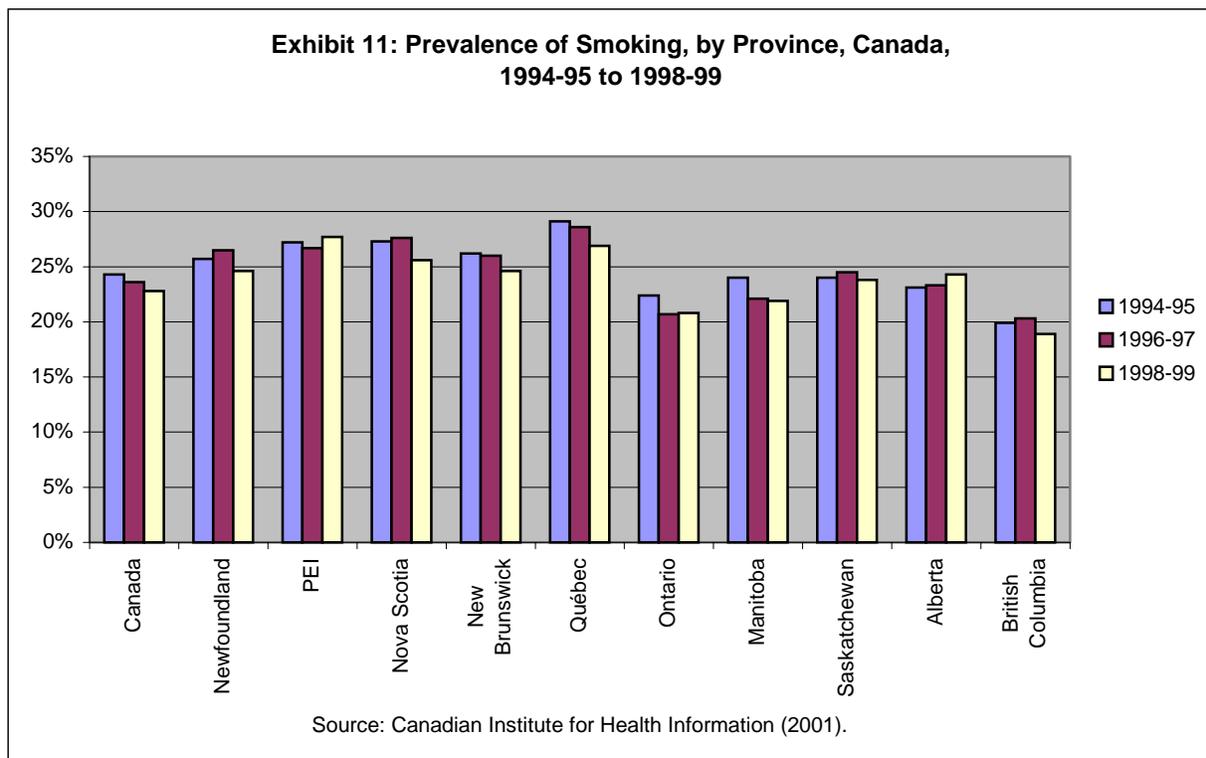
The suicide rates for men and women stand in sharp contrast to the incidence of depression. In fact, during the 1990s, men were nearly four times as likely as women to commit suicide in Canada. The overall suicide rates appear to have declined slightly over the 1980s and 1990s.



The Bottom Line: The prevalence of depressive symptoms in Canada declined slightly during the 1990s, although the rates appear to vary somewhat by province and continue to affect women disproportionately compared to men. Suicide rates declined slightly as well, with men (especially those in their early 20s) being much more at risk than women.

Lifestyle

Of the many possible measures of the lifestyle indicator, the issue of smoking stands out as an important aspect of quality of life. The NPHS has measured smoking behaviour throughout the 1990s. The NPHS data point to a gradual decline in the percentage of daily smokers from 24.3 percent in 1994-95 to 22.8 percent in 1998-99 (Canadian Institute for Health Information 2001).



In 1998-99 at the provincial level, British Columbia continued to lead the way with the lowest proportion of daily smokers at 18.9 percent. In contrast, the Atlantic provinces and Québec had higher proportions of daily smokers than anywhere else in Canada. The pattern of a gradual decline for these provinces during the 1990s mirrors that of the rest of the country, but more than one in four adult Canadians in these regions continued to smoke daily in 1999. The Prairie provinces had slightly lower rates, followed by Ontario at just under 21 percent.

The Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUM) provides additional data with respect to smoking prevalence and exposure to environmental tobacco smoke in the home (Health Canada, 2000). The latest results for the year 2000 point toward a decline from the previous year for each of three age groups (15-19, 20-24, 25 and older), with the highest current smoker rates among the 20- to 24-year-old group. While the study indicates a higher overall smoking prevalence rate among Canadians 15 years and older (24 percent) compared to the NPHS, the figure nevertheless represents the lowest level since regular monitoring began in 1965. In addition, the CTUM data

indicate that Canadian males aged 15 and older are more likely to smoke than females (27 percent vs. 23 percent), but that the difference disappears if one compares only teens.

Finally, the rate of exposure of children under the age of 12 to second-hand smoke from cigarettes, cigars or pipes declined significantly from 33 percent in the mid-1990s to 25 percent in 2000. Roughly corresponding to the smoking prevalence rates, children in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta were less often exposed to second-hand smoke, while children in Québec, the Atlantic provinces and the Prairie provinces exceeded the national exposure rates.

The Bottom Line: The prevalence of daily smoking continued to decline across the country during the 1990s. The Atlantic provinces and Québec had the highest provincial rates, while adults in their early twenties and men tend to smoke more often as well. During the 1990s, every province experienced a decline in the exposure of children to second-hand smoke, with the most dramatic declines being among family households in Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland.

3. Education/Learning

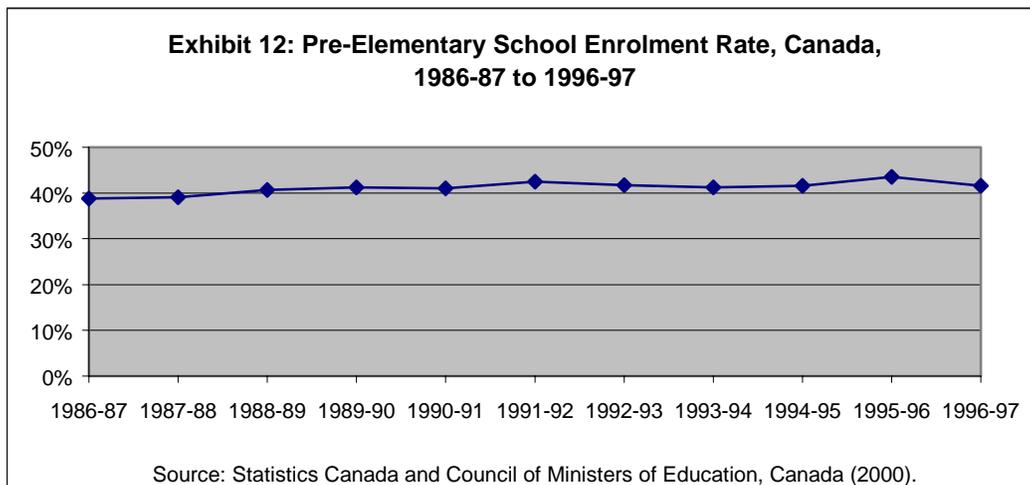
Much like the discussions on health and the health care system, Canadians acknowledge the central importance of education in assessing their quality of life. In the public dialogue discussions, several common issues often received attention, such as the importance of maintaining and improving the quality of a universal, accessible system. The current report card presents measures for the following indicators:

- participation in primary and secondary education and educational attainment
- access to post-secondary education
- lifelong learning
- adult literacy
- youth literacy
- quality of the education system

Participation in Primary and Secondary Education and Educational Attainment

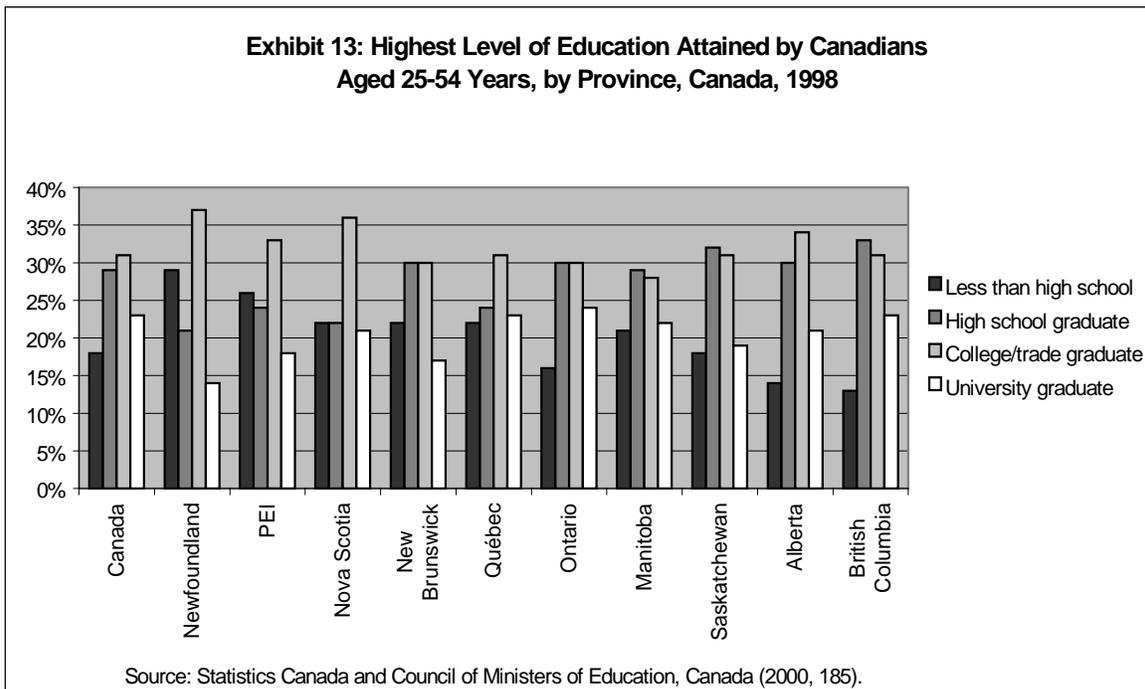
The degree to which Canadians remain in school (at least through high school) has a connection to their quality of life. The evidence confirms that a longer tenure in school tends to be associated with a number of positive social and economic benefits. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (Statistics Canada and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada 2000) has produced an analysis of an extensive array of education indicators, including educational enrolment and attainment figures.

One measure of access that arguably has a connection with quality of life concerns the extent of pre-elementary enrolment, which tends to be correlated positively with educational success and attainment. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2000) data reveal some slight annual variation in enrolment rates over time, but throughout the 1990s the rates were generally in the range of 41-42 percent.



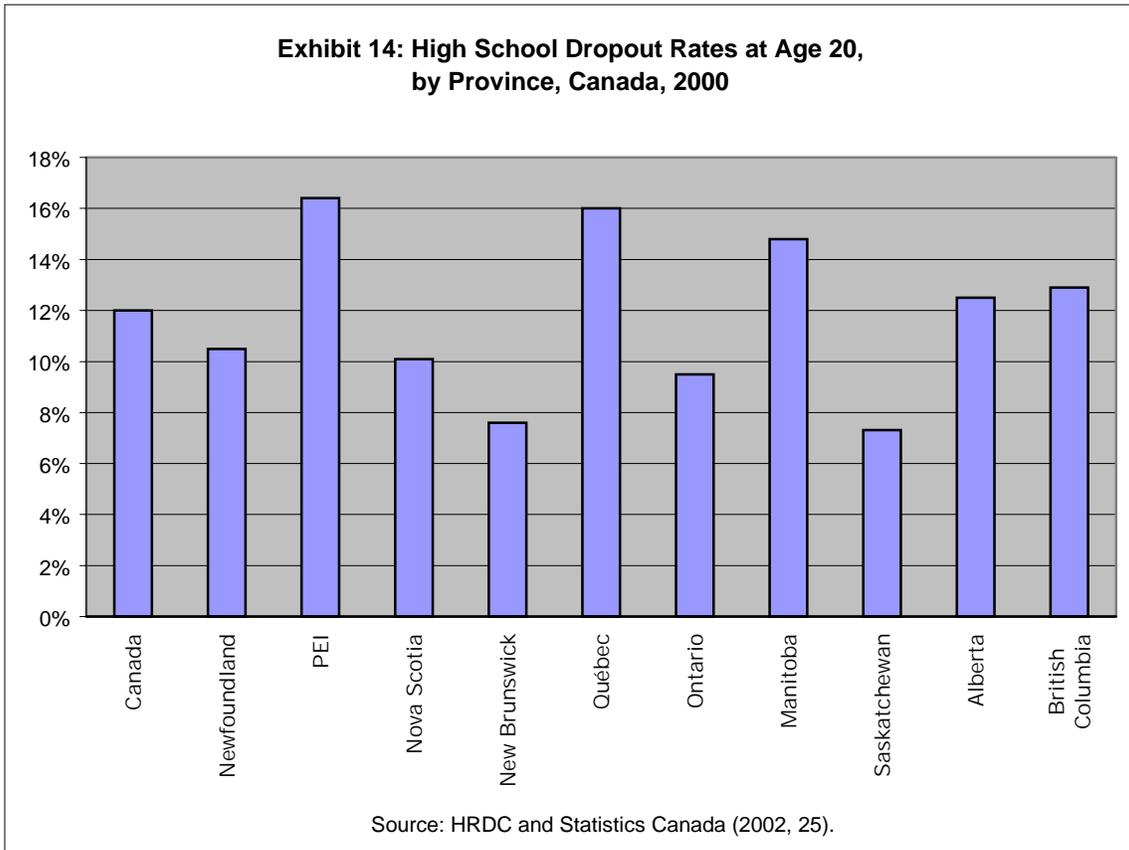
The pre-elementary enrolment rates vary more widely across the provinces. Ontario has by far the highest rate, regularly exceeding 50 percent.

At the other end of the continuum, most Canadians have completed high school and many have completed or continue to pursue higher education by the age of 25. In 1998, approximately 82 percent of Canadians aged 25-54 had completed high school, which reflects a significant increase from 73 percent in 1990. Among 25- to 29-year-olds, the rate of high school completion rose from 80 percent in 1990 to 87 percent in 1998. In fact, university graduates constituted 26 percent of the population aged 25-29, compared with 17 percent nearly one decade earlier.

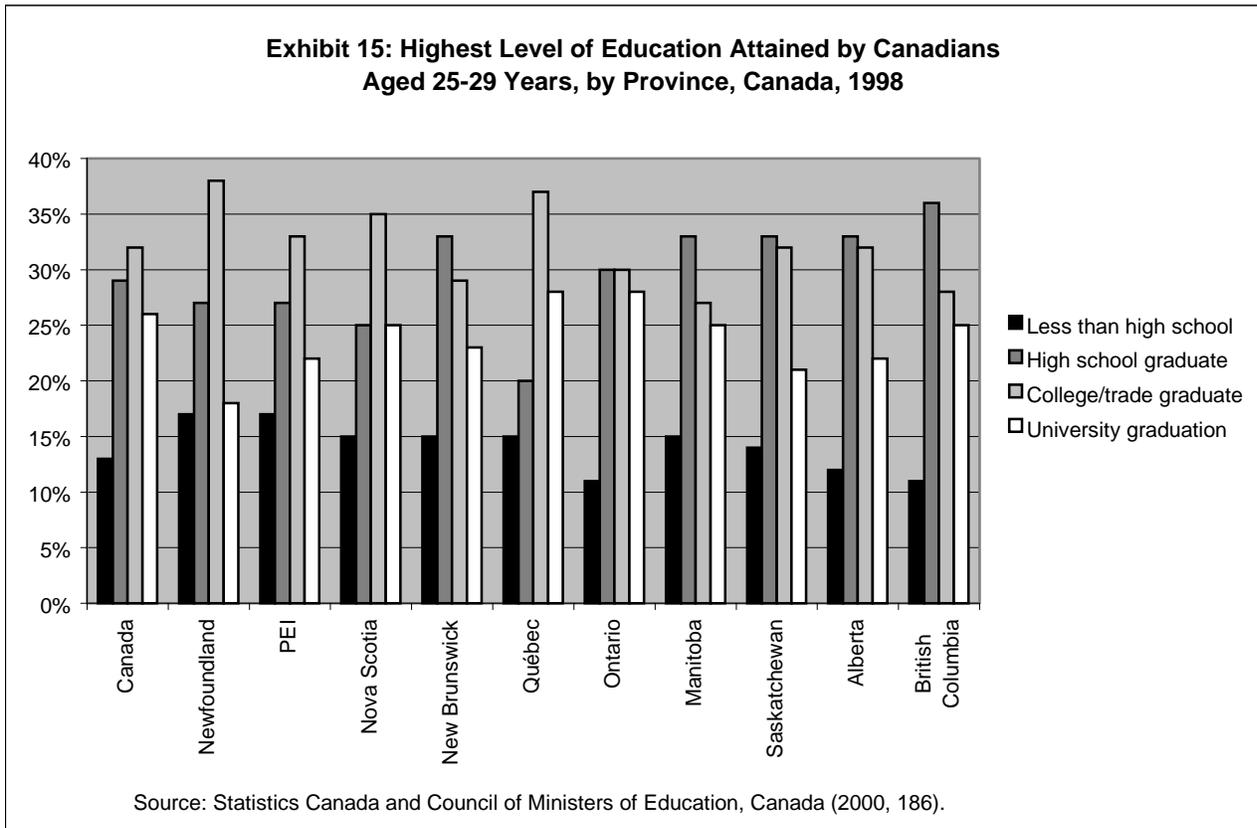


High school graduation rates increased in all provinces over the past decade, although some disparities persist. Ontario and British Columbia have the highest graduation rates among 25- to 29-year-olds at 89 percent, followed closely by Alberta at 88 percent. The other provinces have graduation rates closer to 85 percent.

Significant progress was made through the decade in reducing the dropout rate nationally. As of December 1999, the high school dropout rate for 20-year-olds was 12 percent (HRDC and Statistics Canada, 2002). This represents a one-third reduction from the 18 percent rate in 1991. In particular, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan saw large decreases in the high school dropout rate. Nevertheless, dropout rates remained high in most jurisdictions for boys compared to girls.



The Bottom Line: School enrolment at the pre-elementary level was fairly constant through the 1990s, but clearly higher in Ontario than elsewhere in the country. High school completion rates have increased across the country over the last decade. Ontario and British Columbia continued to lead in terms of graduation rates, but the other provinces closed the gap considerably in the 1990s. By 1999, the high school dropout rate for 20-year-olds stood at 12 percent — a one-third reduction from 18 percent in 1991.

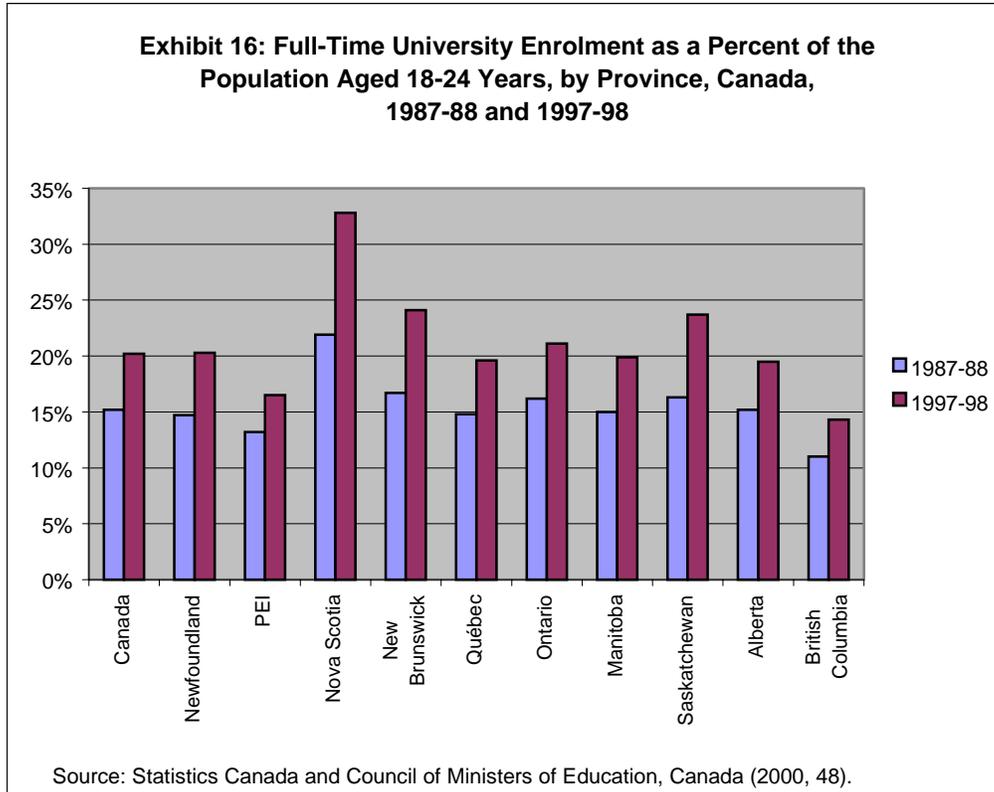


Access to Post-Secondary Education

By 1998, more Canadians in the 25-29 age range were college and trade graduates (32 percent) or university graduates (26 percent) than ever before in Canadian history. In addition, over the 10-year span between 1987-88 and 1997-98, full-time university enrolment among those in the 18-24 age group increased from 15 percent to 20 percent. In 1997-98, women represented 56 percent of full-time undergraduate enrolment in Canada.

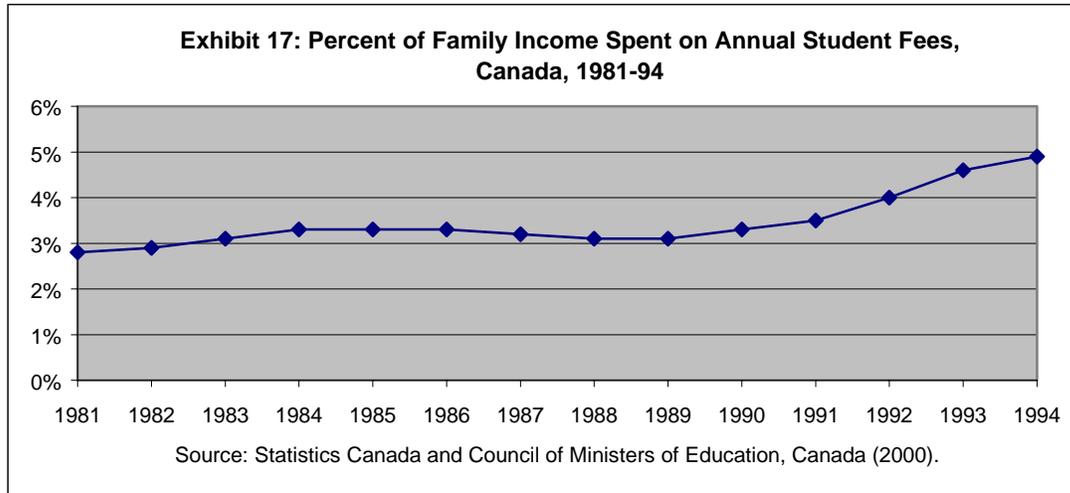
The full-time university enrolment rates for the population aged 18-24 increased for every province during the 10-year span from the 1987-88 academic year to 1997-98. The proportionate increases were greatest for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. However, there was a clear levelling-off in full-time enrolment rates after 1991-92, and this was especially the case for new university entrants. This was also the period during which tuition fees rose steeply as governments reduced university funding. Between 1982-83 and 1998-99, government funding to universities decreased as a percentage of university operating revenue — from 74 percent to 55 percent (Statistics Canada and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada 2000). Over the same period, tuition fees roughly doubled, increasing as a percentage of operating revenue, from 8 percent to 17 percent.

In 1998, Nova Scotia led the way with the highest university enrolment rate for 18- to 24-year-olds at nearly 33 percent. New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Ontario ranked second through fourth, respectively, but with rates nearly 10 points behind Nova Scotia, which has many students from out of province. British Columbia had the lowest full-time university enrolment rate at 14 percent, followed by Prince Edward Island at 16 percent. The lower rates in British Columbia and Alberta in part reflect the fact that these two provinces have many university transfer programs, which end up being counted in the college enrolment statistics. Their part-time enrolment rates tend to be higher than other jurisdictions as well.



The increased university enrolment should be weighed against the issue of annual student costs, which may deter otherwise capable and interested students from attending. The overall debt levels for the half of the population who borrowed to attend a post-secondary institution have been increasing. In 1995, two years after completing their education, students owed more than twice as much as the previous cohort who graduated in 1986. In addition, there has been a marked increase in the percentage of family income spent to cover annual student fees, as shown in Exhibit 17.

In part, higher debt levels on graduation reflect increases in tuition and other costs, at a time during the 1990s when family income (in constant dollars) changed little. Changes also took place in the 1990s in the access students had to loans over grants.



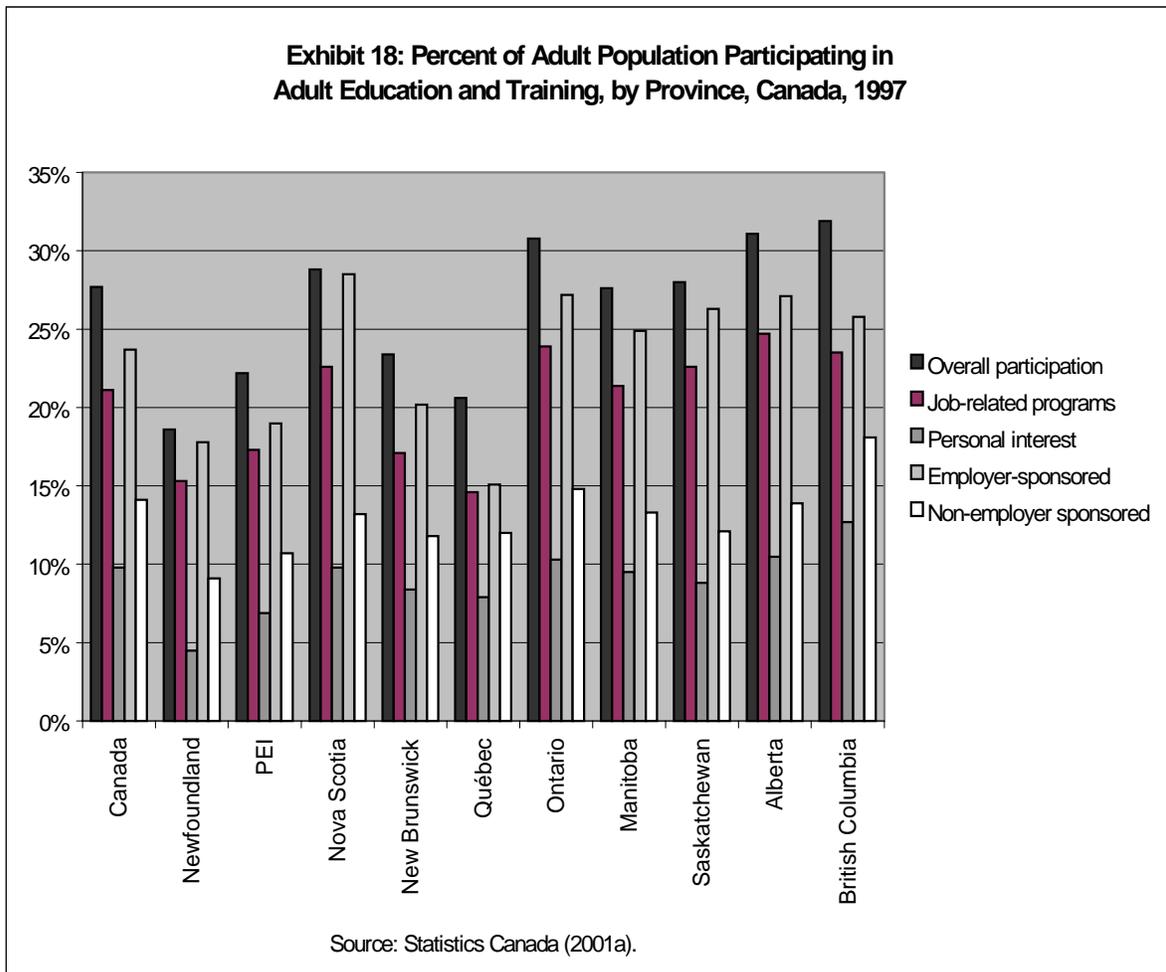
The Bottom Line: Full-time enrolment in post-secondary institutions grew rapidly over the 1980s, but levelled off after 1991-92. The financial costs of attending have increased, however, especially at the university level. That means that a higher proportion of family income must be spent to cover the costs of pursuing a post-secondary education, and that students are carrying a much higher debt load after graduating. Nevertheless, enrolment rates — especially among young women — were higher at the end of the 1990s than they were a decade earlier.

Lifelong Learning

Canadians have expressed considerable support for the importance of lifelong learning to maintaining a higher quality of life. The evidence indicates that, throughout the 1990s, many Canadian adults pursued additional education and training, often in job-related situations. According to Statistics Canada (2001a), nearly 28 percent of Canadians participated in adult education and training programs in 1997. This compares to 30.3 percent reported for 1993, and 28.9 percent reported for 1991.

The rate was above the national average in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. These rates were much lower in Québec and the Atlantic provinces (with the exception of Nova Scotia).

Generally speaking, the most common form of participation was in job-related programs/courses. Nova Scotia had the highest participation rate in employer-sponsored programs/courses, while British Columbia had the highest percentage participating in non-employer-sponsored programs/courses. Québec had the lowest participation rates in either job-related or employer-sponsored programs/courses in 1997.



Rubenson's analysis (2001) determined that participation rates are higher among those who already have substantial formal education as compared with those who have less than a high school diploma. In 1997, among those with less than a high school education, only 15 percent participated in adult education and training programs, whereas 43 percent of those with university education participated.

The Bottom Line: Adult participation in education and training programs declined slightly during the 1990s. Participation rates tended to be higher in Ontario, Nova Scotia and the Western provinces, and highest among those who already have university education.

Adult Literacy

The importance for any country of literacy skills for the improvement of quality of life and for economic growth cannot be overestimated. Strong literacy skills are especially important for economies like Canada's that rely heavily on information and communications technology. At the individual level, low levels of literacy can affect a person's ability to find work, to perform well on the job and to participate more broadly in society. Canadians value literacy both for the economic benefits it brings, *and* for its ability to enhance the culture as a whole.

The first International Adult Literacy Survey, conducted in 1994-95, provides a solid baseline upon which to evaluate Canadian literacy levels. The test assessed three domains of literacy: prose scale (ordinary texts), document scale (graphics such as maps and timetables) and quantitative scale (basic calculations, such as tips). The following examines the results on the prose scale, which represents an excellent summary measure of functional literacy.

In a comparative context, Canada ranks higher on the various scales than most of the 22 countries studied and tends to be comparable to Australia, Germany and the United States, while lagging behind the Nordic countries and the Netherlands (Tuijnman 2001). The detailed results show, however, that Canada has higher levels of inequality in the distribution of literacy skills compared to most countries. Compared to other countries, a higher proportion of the population tends to be clustered in both the low end and the high end of the scale. This polarization between those who struggle with literacy tasks and those who are highly literate was also evident in the United States. Sweden had the highest percentage of adults (26-65 years old) at level 3 or above (on a 5-point scale), while the Netherlands and Germany tended to have higher proportions at level 3, the middle level.

In total, more than half (56 percent) of the Canadian population aged 26-65 achieved scores of 3 or higher on the prose scale. At the regional level, the four Western provinces had the highest proportion achieving a prose literacy level of 3 or higher, followed by Ontario, the Atlantic provinces and Québec.

Among those aged 16-25, the overall performance on the prose scale was *higher* among Québec residents than elsewhere in the country. Roughly seven in ten young adults in Québec attained level 3 or higher, as compared with 64 percent of young people across Canada as a whole. The Western provinces had the second highest scores, followed by Ontario, while the Atlantic provinces lagged considerably behind, as only 39 percent achieved level 3 ratings. Like all other countries, except the United States, the performance of the younger population in Canada was stronger than for adults over the age of 25.

The Bottom Line: Adults (26-65 years old) in Ontario and the Western provinces fared better on the prose literacy measures than those in the Atlantic provinces, while Québec had the country's lowest levels in 1994-95. On the other hand, young adults in Québec fared better than any other region in Canada, while the Atlantic provinces scored much lower on the prose scale. Finally, while Canada generally fares well in comparative contexts, a relatively high degree of inequality in literacy skills exists among the Canadian population. Nevertheless, younger adults showed stronger literacy skills than those aged 25 years or more, a finding that is consistent with the rising level of educational attainment.

Exhibit 19: Selected Results of the International Adult Literacy Survey, by Age Groups and Region, Canada, 1994-95				
Prose Scale				
	Level 1 (%)	Level 2 (%)	Level 3 (%)	Level 4/5 (%)
Canada				
16-25	11	26	44	20
26-65	18	26	33	23
Atlantic Provinces				
16-25	11	32	24	15
26-65	22	23	38	17
Québec				
16-25	—	22	56	14
26-65	24	27	41	8
Ontario				
16-25	17	24	39	21
26-65	15	28	26	31
Western Provinces				
16-25	—	28	41	25
26-65	15	22	34	29
Source: Statistics Canada and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2000).				

Youth Literacy

Canadians are also concerned that young people receive excellent schooling and achieve higher literacy rates. The School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) was administered to samples of 13- and 16-year-old students across Canada during the mid-1990s and again during the late 1990s (Statistics Canada and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada 2000). These data offer both national and provincial estimates of the abilities of young people in Canada in the areas of mathematics, reading, writing and science. Current data focus on reading and mathematics abilities.

For 13-year-olds, national achievement levels in mathematics declined slightly between 1993 and 1997. The reading levels (assessed in 1994 and 1998) remained stable from 1994 to 1998. In 1997, 13-year-olds in Québec and Alberta, and French-speaking teens in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Manitoba exceeded national averages in mathematics. Québec led the country in reading achievement, followed by Alberta, Newfoundland, Ontario (English-speaking) and Prince Edward Island.

Among the 16-year-olds, the national achievement levels for mathematics (1993 and 1997) and reading (1994 and 1998) remained stable. In 1998, the older teens in Québec stood out, along

with their younger counterparts, in terms of mathematics, far exceeding the national averages in achieving performance levels of 3 or higher on the SAIP (on a 5-point scale). The only other groups to exceed the national averages in mathematics were French-speaking teens in New Brunswick and Manitoba, as well as Albertans.

The Bottom Line: While mathematics skills appear to have declined slightly during the 1990s among 13- and 16-year-olds in Canada, reading levels have remained fairly constant. Québec continues to rank first in terms of having a larger proportion of its teens achieve higher reading levels. Where Francophones are among the minority in the provinces, however, their reading skills tend to be lower than average.

Student Achievement

Data for 2000 are provided by the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) which administered tests of achievement in reading, mathematics and science to 15-year-olds. Among the 32 countries participating in PISA, Canadian students ranked second in reading, sixth in mathematics and fifth in science (HRDC, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and Statistics Canada 2001). The performance of students in Alberta was significantly above the Canadian average in all three domains, as was the performance of students in Québec in mathematics. While students in the four Atlantic provinces performed significantly below the national average, their performance was at or above the middle of the international range.

PISA 2000 focused on reading achievement in particular. Girls performed significantly better than boys, a source of concern since reading performance can have a profound effect on performance in other subjects. Unlike in most countries, where students from high socioeconomic backgrounds performed better than students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, in Canada the performance of students from very different socioeconomic backgrounds was more similar.

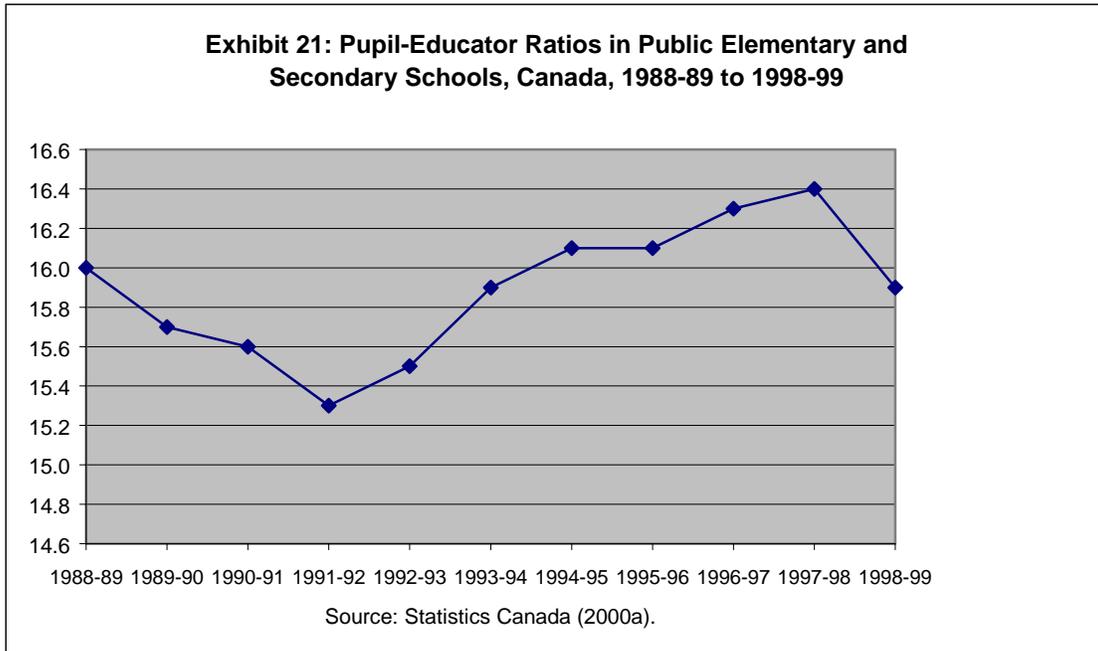
Exhibit 20: Average Reading Scores, by Gender, Province and Selected Country, 2000		
	Girls (Average)	Boys (Average)
Canada	551	519
France	519	490
United States	518	490
United Kingdom	537	512
Germany	502	468
Japan	537	507
Italy	507	469
Russian Federation	481	443
Australia	546	513
Belgium	525	492
Finland	571	520
Mexico	432	411
Sweden	536	499
Switzerland	510	480
Newfoundland	538	496
Prince Edward Island	535	500
Nova Scotia	538	505
New Brunswick	525	478
Québec	553	521
Ontario	548	518
Manitoba	548	513
Saskatchewan	548	512
Alberta	571	533
British Columbia	555	523
Source: HRDC, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and Statistics Canada (2001b, 4).		

The Bottom Line: Achievement in mathematics and reading remained relatively stable among 13- and 16-year-olds in the 1990s. Francophone teens in Québec continued to perform strongly in terms of reading and mathematics. Canadian students also ranked well compared to most other countries on international standardized tests of achievement, a good performance exhibited by all provinces. However, outside Québec, minority language students performed more poorly than other students. Canada stands out as having success at achieving strong performance in reading for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background. However, girls continue to outperform boys, especially in terms of reading skills. That, combined with evidence that high school dropout rates remain higher for boys and post-secondary enrolment rates remain lower, raises concerns that more boys may be “at risk,” with implications for their prospects in the longer run.

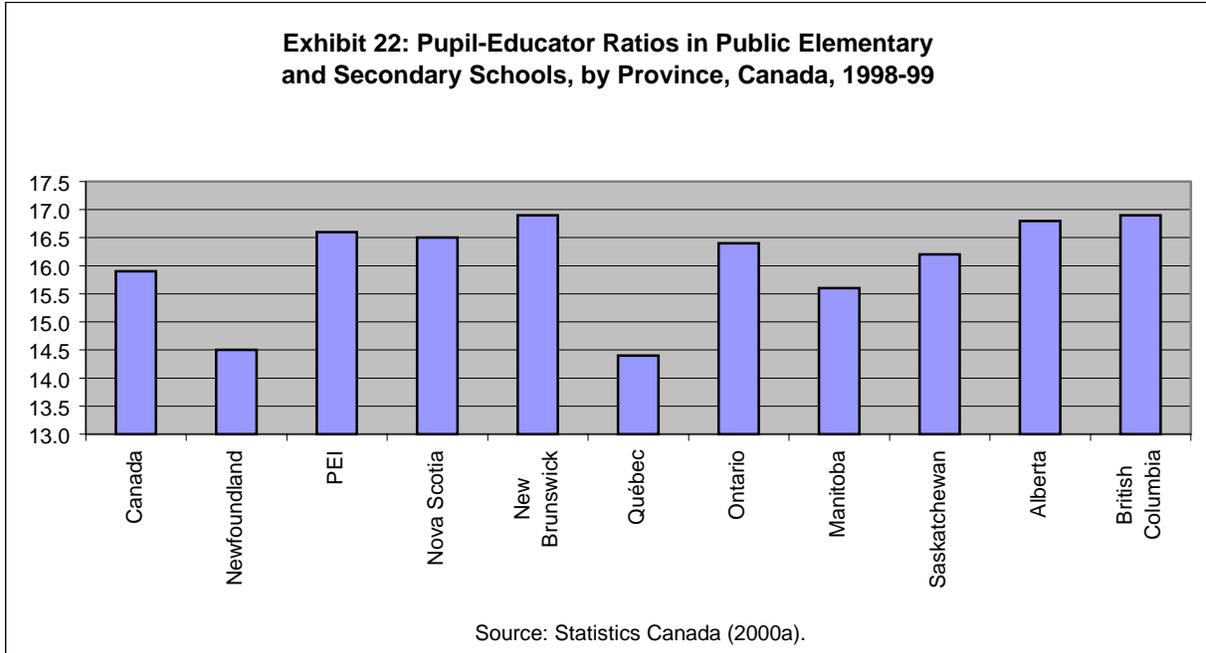
Quality of the Education System

Measuring the quality of the education system is a rather difficult task. One could argue that student performances, as indicated by the achievement levels discussed earlier, might be a relevant outcome of quality education systems. Another measure that serves as an imperfect proxy is the pupil-educator ratio in public elementary and secondary schools in Canada. Although it's a disputed measure, the pupil-educator ratio taps into quality both in terms of the amount of time teachers can devote to individual students and as a partial reflection of the available resources invested in teaching and learning.

The information for the country as a whole reveals a steady decline in pupil-educator ratios in the late 1980s and the very early 1990s (Statistics Canada and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada 2000). Starting in 1991-92, the trend reversed such that the national ratio displayed a gradual climb upward to a peak of 16.4 in 1997-98. That rate reflected the highest such ratio in the last decade, followed by a decline the following academic year (Statistics Canada 2000a).



At the provincial level in 1998-99, the highest pupil-educator ratios (all above the national average of 16) were found in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. Ontario exceeded the national average as well, while Québec, Manitoba and Newfoundland had pupil-educator ratios below 16. Many provinces followed the national trends of declines followed by increases during the early to mid-1990s, although the Atlantic provinces — with the notable exception of Nova Scotia — showed overall declines in pupil-educator ratios.



The Bottom Line: While only an indirect measure of the quality of education, the evidence indicates that pupil-educator ratios in public elementary and secondary schools increased gradually through the 1990s, followed by a decline in the 1998-99 academic year. Some variation exists at the provincial level, with Newfoundland and Québec having the lowest pupil-educator ratios in the nation. Future work should focus on developing alternative measures to assess the quality of education more directly.

4. Environment

Virtually every quality of life measurement system includes tracking of environmental issues. The public dialogue discussions emphasized several aspects of the environment as well. In response to the recommendations of the dialogue groups, the report card examines the following issues:

- air quality
- water quality
- waste management
- renewable energy sources

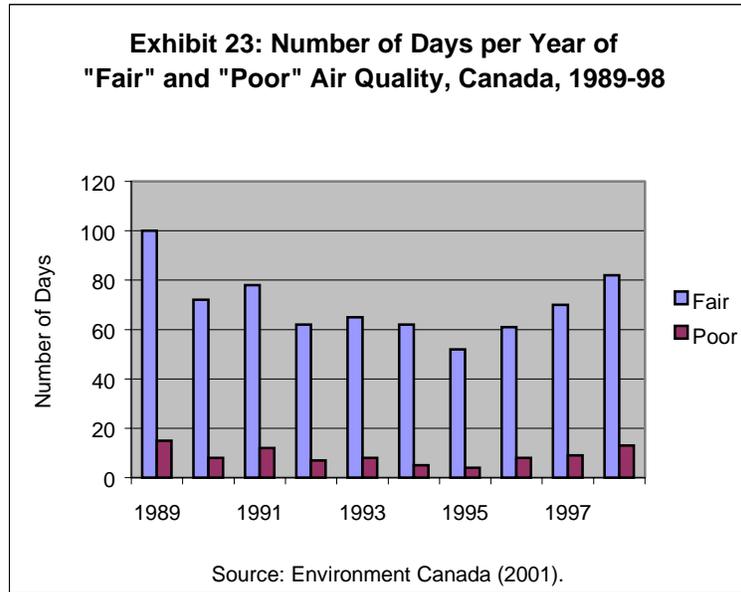
One other area for which suitable measures still need to be developed beyond the municipal level involves outdoor green spaces. The citizens who participated in the public dialogue groups stressed the need to maintain or even expand the availability of green spaces as a natural extension of clean, healthy environments. There are no data currently available at the national level that permit an accurate measurement of what citizens believe matters most with respect to outdoor green spaces.

Air Quality

In a recent COMPAS poll, conducted in May 2001, a national sample of Canadians was asked the following question: “Generally speaking, how concerned are you about the air you breathe?” Some 40 percent responded that they were extremely concerned, while another 35 percent suggested that they were very concerned. The evidence generated by Environment Canada on air quality offers some basis for concern, at least as captured by recent trends.

The Index of the Quality of Air (IQA) represents the single most comprehensive measure of air quality in Canada. The IQA converts air pollutant data for several gases and suspended particulates to a common scale, which then expresses the number of days of poor, fair and good air quality. The aggregate results over the past decade point to a U-shaped pattern: the number of days of fair and poor air quality peaked in 1989, followed by a gradual decline through the mid-1990s, and an increase in fair/poor air quality through 1998. Throughout the 1990s, the total number of fair and poor air quality days each year was lower than that of the 1980s. The upward trend in the late 1990s, however, meant that the 1998 figures started to approach the figures for the late 1980s. Environment Canada attributes the recent increases to the combustion of fossil fuels, which have produced more warm days that contribute to ground-level ozone formation.

The Bottom Line: About three fourths of Canadians report being extremely concerned or very concerned about air quality. The hard evidence reveals that air quality in Canada improved throughout the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. In the late 1990s, however, the pattern reversed with annual increases in the number of fair/poor air quality days through 1998.

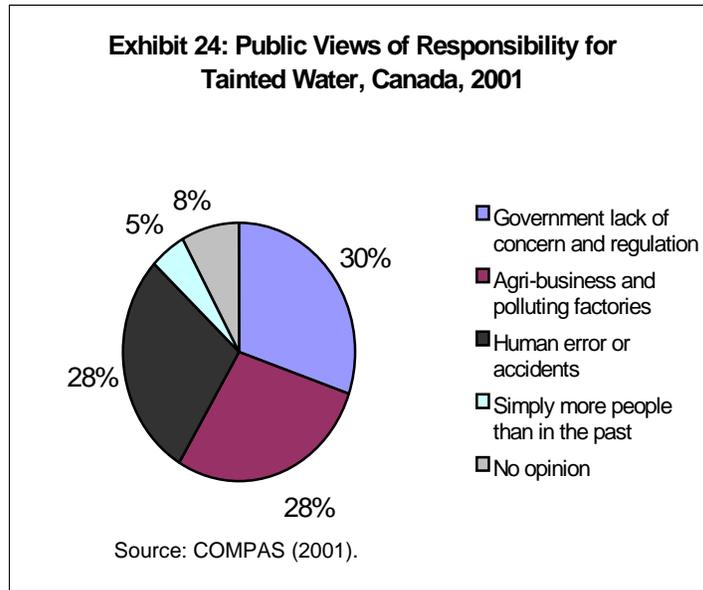


Water Quality

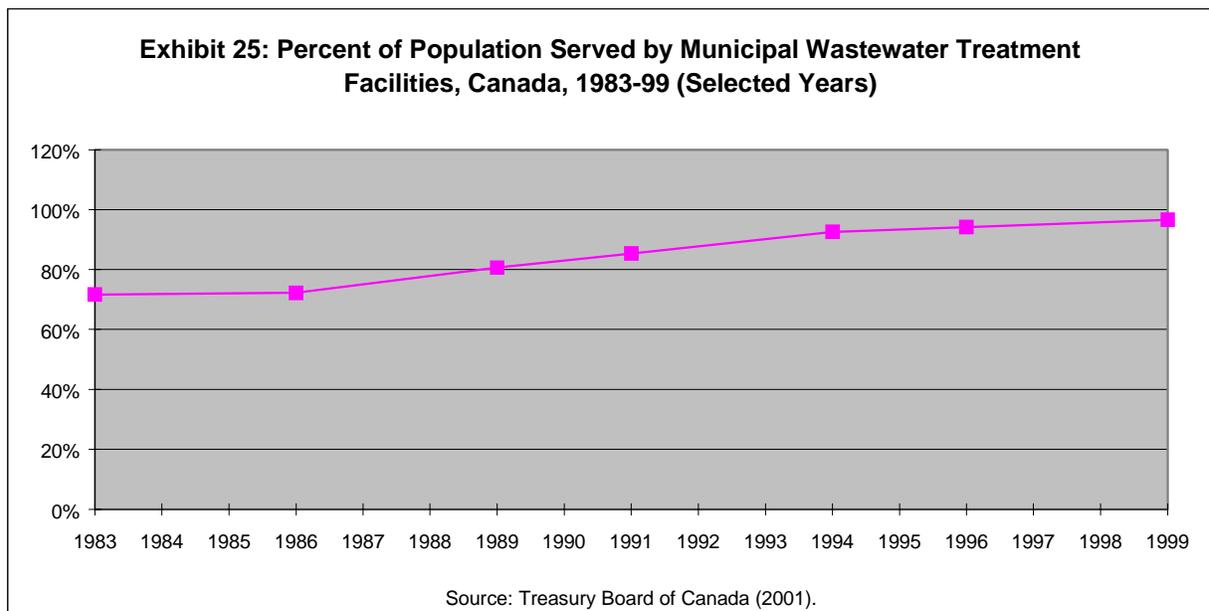
As with air quality, most Canadians are concerned about the quality of their water. A recent COMPAS poll, for example, determined that two thirds of Canadians were either “extremely concerned” or “very concerned” about their drinking water (COMPAS 2001). At the same time, roughly half of Canadians were confident that the water coming into their homes can be considered safe to drink, with rural residents (70 percent) expressing the most confidence. Similarly, about half of Canadians reported using filtering systems or counter-top filters for their drinking water, while slightly more than two thirds reported drinking bottled water at least sometimes (one in three drank bottled water everyday).

Anglophones were three times more likely to use filtering systems than Francophones (38 percent versus 13 percent), and more than twice as likely to order bottled water in restaurants (26 percent versus 12 percent). Ontarians were the most likely to use filtering systems at 47 percent, followed by 29 percent in the Western provinces, 27 percent in Atlantic Canada and 14 percent in Québec.

Finally, the public tends to blame problems with tainted water equally on the government, industry and human error.



Despite the concerns that many Canadians have expressed, at present there are no consistent data to assess groundwater quality nationally or across the regions. Consequently, only indirect measures of water quality tend to be available. For example, the Treasury Board of Canada (2001) produces publications such as *Canada's Performance 2001*, wherein data on wastewater treatment from municipal systems are presented as a measure of water quality. The report argues that threats to water quality mainly stem from municipal wastewater discharges. By such reasoning, the more advanced treatments of wastewater should help to protect and maintain overall water quality. An even broader or cruder measure would be the percentage of municipal populations that are served by wastewater treatment. The data below demonstrate that the proportion of municipal populations served by wastewater treatment has increased throughout the last 20 years, such that better than 96 percent of municipal populations are served accordingly.



The Bottom Line: The majority of Canadians are concerned about the quality of their drinking water. More and more Canadians are using filtering systems and/or drinking bottled water, particularly in Ontario and the Western provinces. However, no standardized measures of water quality exist, which means that national or regional estimates of water quality are not available. On the other hand, while 27 percent of the municipal population in Canada on municipal sewer systems in 1983 received no sewage treatment, that percentage declined to 20 percent by 1989 and to less than 4 percent by 1999.

Waste Management

Another dimension of the environment that Canadians link directly to quality of life involves waste management. To that end, they have made a concerted effort to increase their recycling habits. In examining the data on materials consumed in packaging materials, recent trends confirm the extent to which Canadians have committed to recycling. Whereas in 1988, the vast majority of new packaging was discarded, less than one third of materials consumed in packaging were discarded in 1996. Both the rates of reused and recycled packaging materials increased sharply in the early 1990s and continued to climb at slower rates through the 1990s.

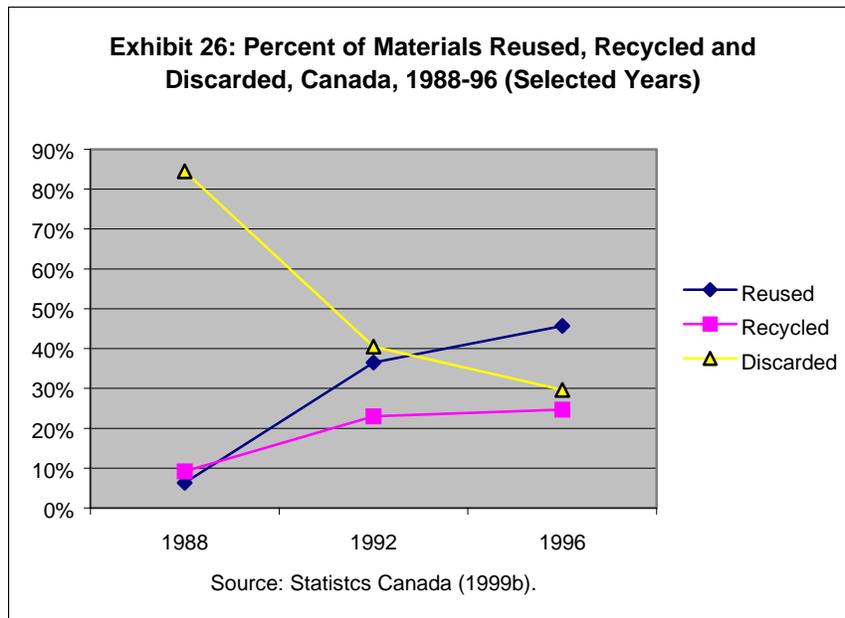


Exhibit 27: Consumption, Recycling and Reuse of New Packaging Materials, Canada, 1988-96 (Selected Years)

Material	Total Consumed ^a (in thousand tonnes)			Total Reused (in thousand tonnes)			Total Recycled (in thousand tonnes)			Total Discarded (in thousand tonnes)		
	1988	1992	1996	1988	1992	1996	1988	1992	1996	1988	1992	1996
Wood (pallets, boxes)	1,019.9	1,839.2	2,484.1	312.8	942.1	1,704.0	22.4	64.2	189.0	684.7	832.9	591.2
Paper (boxes, labels, and corrugated cardboard)	2,363.9	3,683.7	2,441.3	—	571.2	345.3	437.1	1,599.9	1,328.1	1,926.8	1,512.6	767.9
Glass	821.4	1,950.6	1,382.0	89.9	1,166.2	823.0	56.5	291.7	303.7	675.0	492.7	255.3
Plastic (containers and wrap)	1,043.5	1,618.8	1,288.8	—	543.9	451.3	21.7	135.8	133.8	1,021.8	939.1	703.7
Metal (excluding aluminum)	959.0	954.9	963.1	—	471.3	660.1	23.7	211.2	114.5	935.3	272.4	188.4
Aluminum	76.3	100.0	129.9	—	7.4	21.1	32.7	92.4	60.7	43.7	—	48.0
Multi-material	112.2	184.1	145.6	—	36.0	34.0	—	1.2	69.6	112.2	146.9	42.0
Textiles	19.8	8.6	15.4	—	3.4	5.5	—	—	1.4	19.8	5.1	8.4
Other	—	108.6	55.7	—	67.8	22.0	—	3.8	—	—	37.0	33.7
Total	6,416.1	10,448.4	8,905.7	402.7	3,809.2	4,066.2	594.1	2,400.1	2,200.7	5,419.2	4,238.7	2,638.5

Notes:

Calculation of weight: “discarded” equals “consumed” minus “reused” minus “recycled.”

a. Includes the following: new packaging; packaging imports minus exports; reused packaging; recycled packaging from industry, households, commercial and institutional establishments; and discarded packaging.

Source: Statistics Canada (2000b).

By the same token, any reduction in non-hazardous waste per capita would be a positive indicator for the environment. The following figures from the Waste Management Industry Survey (Statistics Canada 1999b) show that there was a decline in the total amount of waste disposed per capita between 1994 and 1998. For Canada as a whole, the non-hazardous waste disposed of per capita was 690 kilograms in 1998. The rate was unchanged from 1996, but represented a 5 percent reduction from the 1994 level. Some jurisdictions have witnessed significant decreases, most notably in Atlantic Canada and British Columbia. Ontario has decreased its waste disposed per capita as well, while most other provinces have remained fairly constant.

Exhibit 28: Waste Disposed in Tonnes per Capita, by Province, Canada, 1994, 1996, 1998			
Jurisdiction	1994	1996	1998
Newfoundland	.84	.67	.67
PEI	—	—	—
Nova Scotia	.76	.59	.54
New Brunswick	.76	.67	.62
Québec	.71	.75	.75
Ontario	.67	.62	.61
Manitoba	.84	.84	.85
Saskatchewan	.91	.88	.83
Alberta	.86	.88	.87
British Columbia	.76	.62	.61
Canada	.73	.69	.69

Source: Statistics Canada (1999b).

The Bottom Line: Canada enjoyed significant progress in terms of increasing the use of recycled and reused materials for packaging through the 1990s. In addition, the waste disposed per capita dropped during the 1990s, especially among the Atlantic provinces and British Columbia.

Renewable Energy Sources

One final environmental indicator pertains to the extent to which renewable energy sources are developed. The National Energy Board (1999) has provided estimates of total energy consumption in Canada, measured in petajoules, broken down by source or type of energy. Based upon the Board's work, one can estimate the proportion of total domestic demand for primary energy met by renewable fuels (which does not include nuclear fuel). In 1997, renewable fuels comprised 5.7 percent of the domestic demand for primary energy in Canada. The figure remains essentially unchanged from the 1995 estimate of 5.8 percent.

The Bottom Line: Renewable energy sources comprise only a small proportion of total end use in meeting the domestic demands for energy in Canada. That percentage did not change significantly in the mid-1990s. Whether additional investments will be made in developing renewable fuel alternatives to assume a greater share of the Canadian energy burden remains to be seen.

5. Social Programs and Conditions

In the public dialogue discussions, nearly every group identified and discussed social programs, which were generally considered essential to the quality of life in Canada. The specific programs discussed varied somewhat, although many groups included a variety of income maintenance supports to cover the costs of the basic necessities for vulnerable populations. The general sense for many of the groups was that there should be social support systems in place which are adequate to respond to and meet basic human needs (although these were not defined by the groups). The recommendations for what should be monitored in a national quality of life report card include the following:

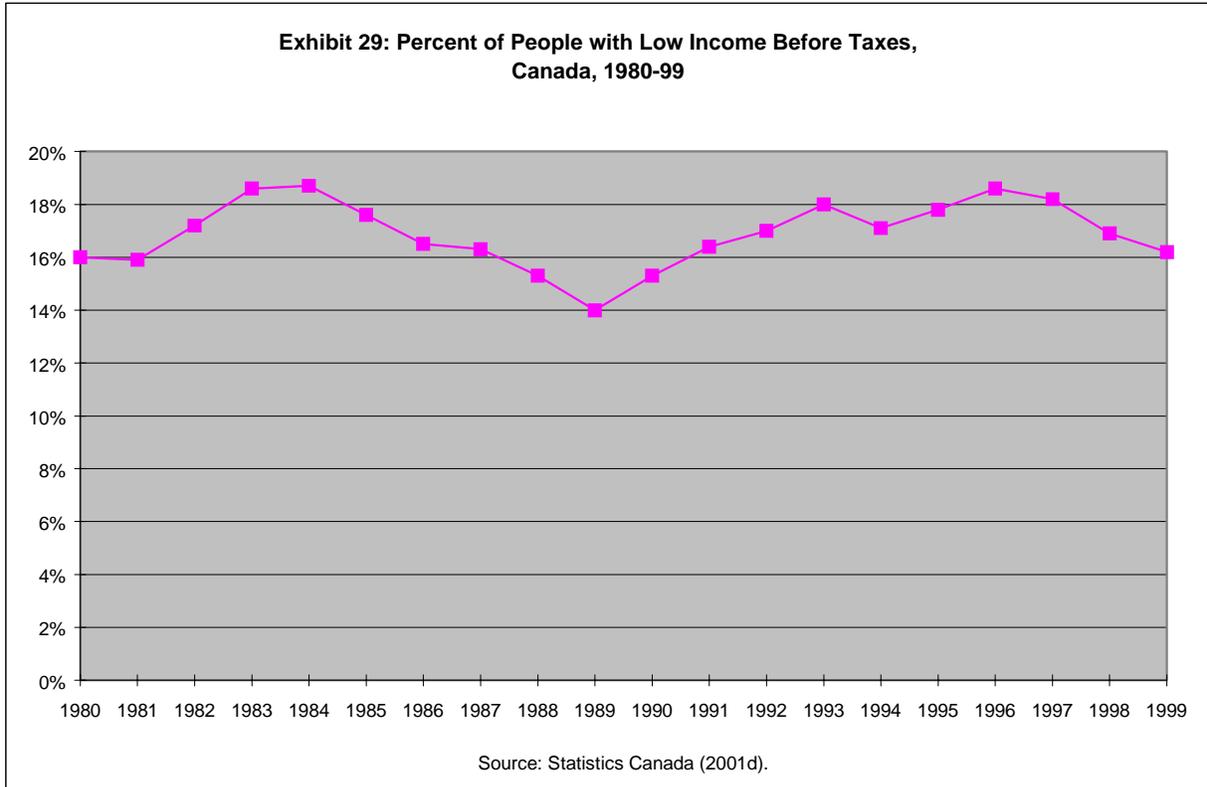
- low income rates
- income supports for basic needs
- availability and affordability of child care
- living wages
- food bank usage
- affordability of housing

Low Income Rates

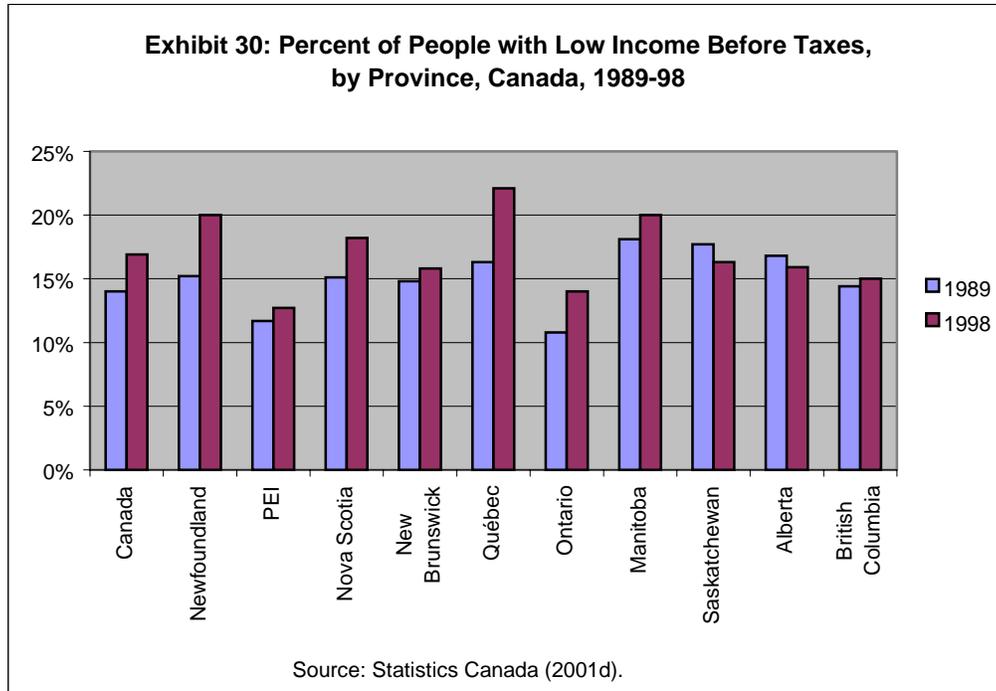
While the debates continue about the best way to measure poverty rates, most observers agree that persistent and widespread poverty detracts from the quality of life in society. Canadians understand that the problem of poverty, particularly among children, tends to produce negative social and health outcomes. However, the most widely cited poverty statistics in Canada — the low income cut-offs (LICOs) produced by Statistics Canada — are not even designated as official poverty rates. Those Canadians subsisting on family or household budgets below the LICOs are defined as living in straitened or strained circumstances rather than living below some absolute standard of poverty.

In the current analysis, LICOs (1992 base) were determined from an analysis of the 1992 Family Expenditure Survey data. These income limits were selected on the basis that families with incomes below the specified cut-offs usually spent 54.7 percent or more of their income on food, shelter and clothing. The LICOs were differentiated by community size of residence and family size.

The data reveal that the percentage of all Canadians living below the LICOs (before taxes) increased from 14.0 percent in 1989 (the lowest total of the past two decades) to a peak of 18.6 percent in 1996. The late 1990s then witnessed a decline back to the pre-recession rate of 16.2 percent in 1999.



All of the provinces (except for Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan) experienced an increase in the proportions of their populations living with low incomes during the early 1990s. Over the span of one full decade, however, the trends were more highly variable. Among the Atlantic provinces, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia continued to have a higher incidence of low-income individuals and households, while Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick returned to their earlier, lower levels. Ontario had a higher proportion of low-income households than a decade earlier, but the most dramatic and sustained rise occurred among the Québec population (22.1 percent in 1998). For the Prairies, while Manitoba had a higher incidence of low-income households in 1998 than a decade earlier, both Saskatchewan and Alberta had lower rates. The British Columbia rate increased substantially through 1996, but since then has nearly returned to the pre-recession rate.



The Bottom Line: The incidence of low income among the general population and the rate of children living in low-income situations in Canada increased to relatively higher levels during the first half of the 1990s. Indeed, these rates often parallel the performance of the broader economy (i.e., during prosperous economic times the rates tend to decrease, and during economic downturns the rates increase). More recently, the incidence of low-income households has decreased somewhat, although the rates remain quite high in several provinces, including Québec, Newfoundland and Manitoba. The evidence suggests that as many as 6 million Canadians continue to live in low-income situations.

Income Supports for Basic Needs

In Canada, social assistance or “welfare” provides individuals and families with the income supports or transfers necessary to meet their basic needs if there are no other available sources of support. Each province and territory establishes eligibility requirements, social assistance rates, assets that recipients may keep and other rules to regulate their income support systems. While Canadians disagree on many of the features that characterize their welfare systems, most believe that there should be at least some supports available for the more vulnerable segments of the general population. Consequently, several of the public dialogue groups considered the adequacy of income supports for meeting basic needs to be a relevant measure.

One such measure consists of determining social assistance benefit levels as a percentage of Statistic Canada’s pre-tax low income cut-offs. At the national level, Schetagne, Jackson and Harman (2001) pooled each jurisdiction’s rates for lone-parent families to estimate social assistance transfer payments as a percentage of the low income cut-offs. Their calculations reveal that the adequacy of social assistance benefits has declined each year since 1994. For lone-parent

families living in medium-sized regions (100,000-499,999 people), the national average for social assistance rates stood at 65 percent in 1999, as compared with 72 percent in 1994.

At the provincial level, welfare income as a percentage of the population living below the low income cut-offs can be broken down by several categories, such as for single employable individuals, disabled persons, lone-parent families and couples with varying numbers of children. For most provinces, the rates of social assistance as a percentage of the low income cut-offs have declined throughout the 1990s. In examining the case of single parents with one child, the data reveal that the Atlantic provinces (led by Newfoundland) provided the most generous benefits in relative terms in 1999. Ontario, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Québec followed closely behind with rates of 57-60 percent of the low income cut-offs. Alberta and Manitoba continued to offer the lowest relative benefits in 1999, just as they had a decade earlier.

The Bottom Line: The social assistance rates and the adequacy of income supports in assisting vulnerable populations across Canada have tended to decline through the 1990s, both nationally and across the various provinces.

Availability and Affordability of Child Care

Public opinion polls in the past have revealed that work–family conflict affects many families across Canada, and that the clear majority of Canadians prefer to have access to some type of quality, affordable daycare (Michalski 1999). These views were confirmed yet again in many of the public dialogue discussions (Michalski 2001). At least some participants in the dialogue groups held in each province trumpeted the notion that access to affordable, quality daycare would be a strong support both for families and for employers, who might then have a larger pool from which to hire.

One measure of affordability involves examining the relative costs of child care in relation to family incomes. Since incomes vary by family type, the Exhibit below examines both lone-parent and two-parent family situations. The data compare the median yearly fees for full-time, centre-based care in 1998 as a percentage of median family income for selected family types and different ages of children. By such a measure, older children are less costly than younger children, and centre-based care consumes a smaller share of family income.

For two-parent families with children, child care costs are reasonably affordable with two wage earners and just one preschooler in the family. The proportionate share of family income devoted to child care costs increases among such families with only one earner, while those with no earners generally cannot afford centre-based care for their children. More commonly, two-parent families must spend an even higher proportion of their available income for two or more children of varying ages.

The main affordability issue for child care relates to lone-parent situations. Lone-parent males who require child care for one preschool child must be able to devote roughly 13 percent of their income for that purpose, while lone-parent females must spend at least 20 percent of their available income. Those lone parents with two or more children who must rely on centre-based

care may find child care costs prohibitive with incomes anywhere near or below the median figures.

Exhibit 31: Median Yearly Fees for Full-Time, Centre-Based Child Care as a Percent of Family Income, Canada, 1998				
		Child aged 0-17 months^a (%)	Child aged 18-36 months^b (%)	Child aged 37-71 months^c (%)
Selected Family Types in Canada	Median incomes (\$)			
Two-parent families with children	70,191	9.1	8.2	7.8
No earner	20,401	31.2	28.1	26.8
One earner	54,587	11.7	10.5	10.0
Two earners	71,502	8.9	8.0	7.6
Lone-parent families	29,887	21.3	19.2	18.3
Male lone-parent families	44,253	14.4	12.9	12.3
Female lone-parent families	27,195	23.4	21.0	20.1

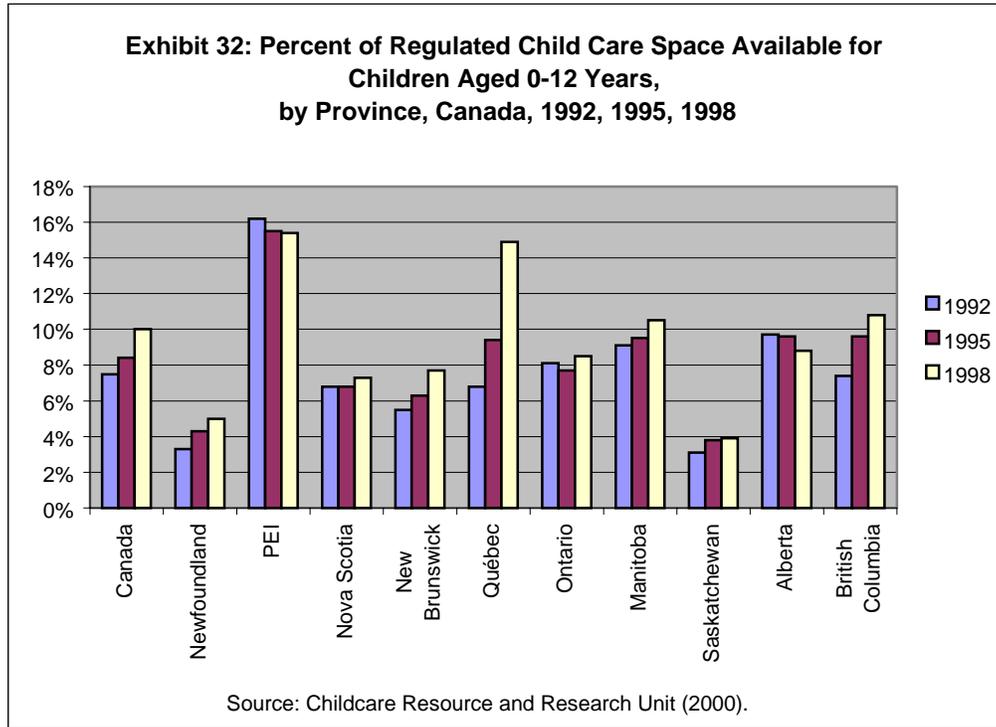
a. Fee for child aged 0-17 months is \$6,372.
b. Fee for child aged 18-36 months is \$5,724.
c. Fee for child aged 37-71 months is \$5,460.

Sources: Childcare Resource and Research Unit (2000).
Statistics Canada (2001d).

Some provincial variation exists in relative child care costs as well, in that lone-parent families in the Atlantic provinces (with the exception of Prince Edward Island) generally have to spend a higher proportion of their available income than the Canadian average: 25 percent or more of their median family income for their first child. Only Manitoba has child care costs comparable to those of the Atlantic provinces. Québec and Saskatchewan follow, while lone parents in the remaining provinces tend to spend 20 percent or less of their median incomes for centre-based child care.

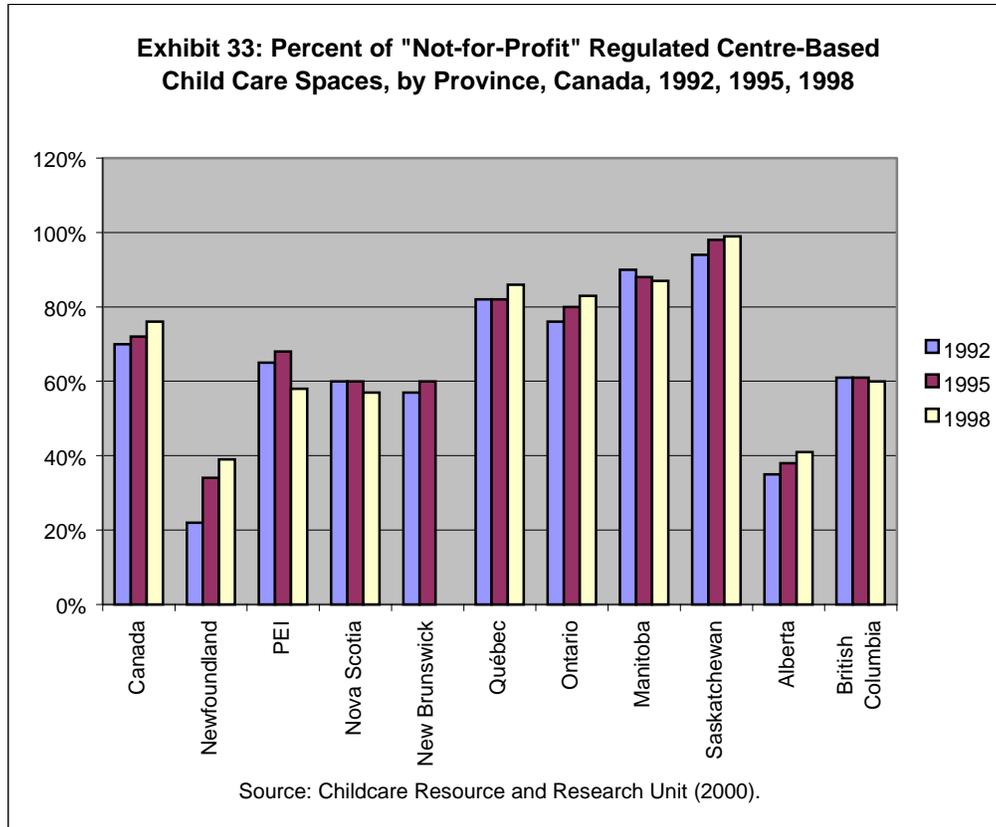
The issue of the availability of high quality child care complements any discussions of affordability. These issues are often discussed in the same breath, as both dimensions are viewed as critical to supporting employed parents in particular. One issue examined in this regard is access to regulated child care spaces, which varies across the provinces and as a result of differences in early childhood policies. At the national level, the Childcare Resource and Research Unit (2000) presents evidence suggesting that access has improved incrementally through the 1990s. In 1992, for example, 7.5 percent of children aged 0-12 had access to regulated child care spaces. This percentage increased slightly in 1995 and again in 1998 to roughly 10 percent. Stated another way, centre-based daycare spaces increased from 262,857 in 1992 to nearly 330,000 in 1998.

At the provincial level during the 1990s, Prince Edward Island had the highest rates of regulated child care space available, followed closely by Québec in 1998. British Columbia and Manitoba were the only other provinces to exceed the 10 percent national average. Saskatchewan and Newfoundland had the lowest percentages of regulated child care spaces for their populations aged 0-12 years throughout the 1990s.



Nearly 77 percent of all regulated centre-based spaces in 1998 were in not-for-profit and publicly-operated facilities, which reflects a gradual increase over the 1990s. By the same token, only 31 percent of children were in subsidized, regulated child care in 1998, a decline from 36 percent in 1992. Annual allocations for children in regulated care did not change much from 1995 to 1998, at \$206.51 per child.

The provincial allocations for regulated child care increased by more than 25 percent overall between 1992 and 1998, led by a doubling of allocations in Québec, British Columbia and Newfoundland. The other Atlantic provinces (except Prince Edward Island) increased their allocations somewhat along with Saskatchewan. Most other provinces allocated roughly similar amounts throughout the 1990s, with Alberta and Manitoba registering real declines. The actual per child allocations for regulated child care were roughly two times higher in Québec, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia, as compared with any other provinces.



The Bottom Line: Child care continues to be a major expense for many families, but especially among lone-parent families with more than one preschooler. The relative costs tend to be higher in the Atlantic provinces, but families where the primary breadwinner earns below the provincial median anywhere in Canada continue to struggle with the affordability issue. The availability of regulated child care increased across most provinces during the 1990s, but the vast majority of spaces continues to be provided by unregulated or private care facilities. In some provinces, the clear majority of regulated, centre-based spaces were in the not-for-profit sector in 1998, such as Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Québec and Ontario. The actual percentage of children in subsidized, regulated child care declined overall during the 1990s. Finally, the provincial allocations for regulated child care have improved dramatically in some areas, though per child expenditures continue to be highest among the larger, more populous provinces.

Living Wages

As Canadian governments have reduced some of their income transfers and social security programs, the pressure has increased for families to assume more of the responsibility for their financial well-being through market earnings. Canadians recognize that the ability to earn a “living wage” can impact directly upon their quality of life. The notion of a living wage implies having a job that pays enough to cover basic family expenses each month and provides some degree of financial security.

One measure that taps into the adequacy of wages concerns the “working poor” — those households whose adult members have at least 49 weeks in total of either full-time or part-time work during a particular year and who fail to earn enough to surpass the low income cut-offs. Ross, Scott and Smith (2000) offer a statistical glimpse of working-poor households over time. Their evidence reveals that while 5 percent of Canadian households could be classified as working poor in 1989 (413,000 households), the figure rose over the 1990s to 6.7 percent in 1997 (678,000 households).

The “working poor” households represented about 31 percent of all non-elderly poor households in Canada in 1997. The proportions of working poor families among the poor households at the provincial levels displayed considerable regional variation. The Prairie provinces and Ontario had much higher rates of working poor households than the national average in 1997. British Columbia had lower than average national rates, followed by Québec at roughly 24 percent. The Atlantic provinces had the lowest proportions of working poor in the country.

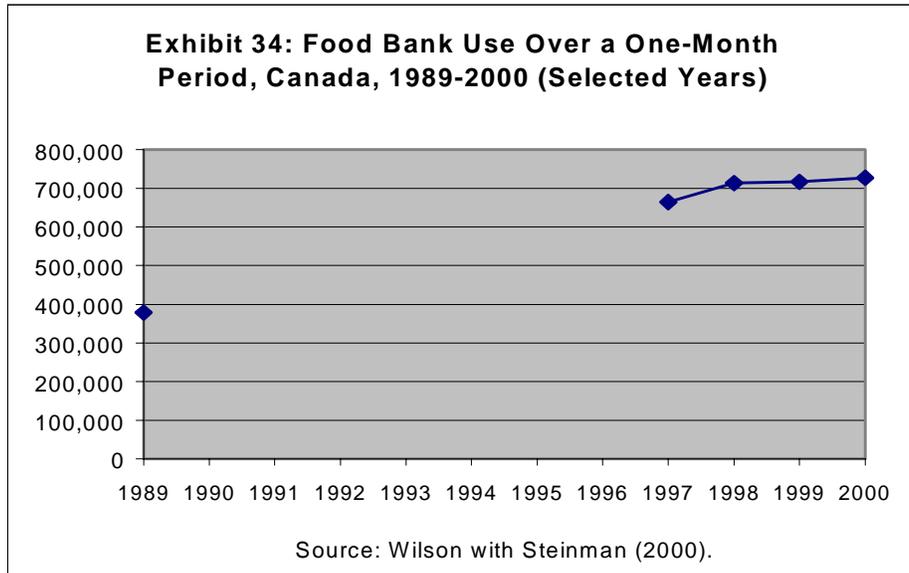
The Bottom Line: The proportion of working poor families increased in the 1990s, with Ontario and the Prairie provinces having the highest proportions of working poor families among all families with incomes below the low income cut-offs.

Food Bank Usage

The degree of food security that Canadians experience is another important indicator of quality of life. One method of measuring food security consists of determining how many people use emergency grocery programs or “food banks” on a monthly basis. A Canadian Association of Food Banks survey indicated that food bank usage has nearly doubled in the past decade, from roughly 378,000 in 1989 to nearly 727,000 in 2000 (Wilson with Steinman 2000). Most of this increase in food bank usage occurred between 1989 and 1998; the figures have not increased much in the past two years.

At the provincial level, more individuals and families in Ontario and Québec access food banks than anywhere else in the country, due to the sheer magnitudes of their provincial populations. These, the two largest provinces, have seen their food bank usage rates hover around 2.5 percent over the past few years, however. The residents of Newfoundland, on the other hand, had the highest rate of food bank usage as a percentage of their population, roughly 6 percent. Apart from Manitoba, no other provinces exceeded 3 percent of their populations accessing food banks.

The Bottom Line: After strong growth in the early to mid-1990s, the absolute numbers and proportions of individuals accessing emergency food programs or food banks have become stable over the past three years. Newfoundland and Manitoba exceeded the national averages for food bank usage, which hovers between 2 percent and 2.5 percent.



Affordability of Housing

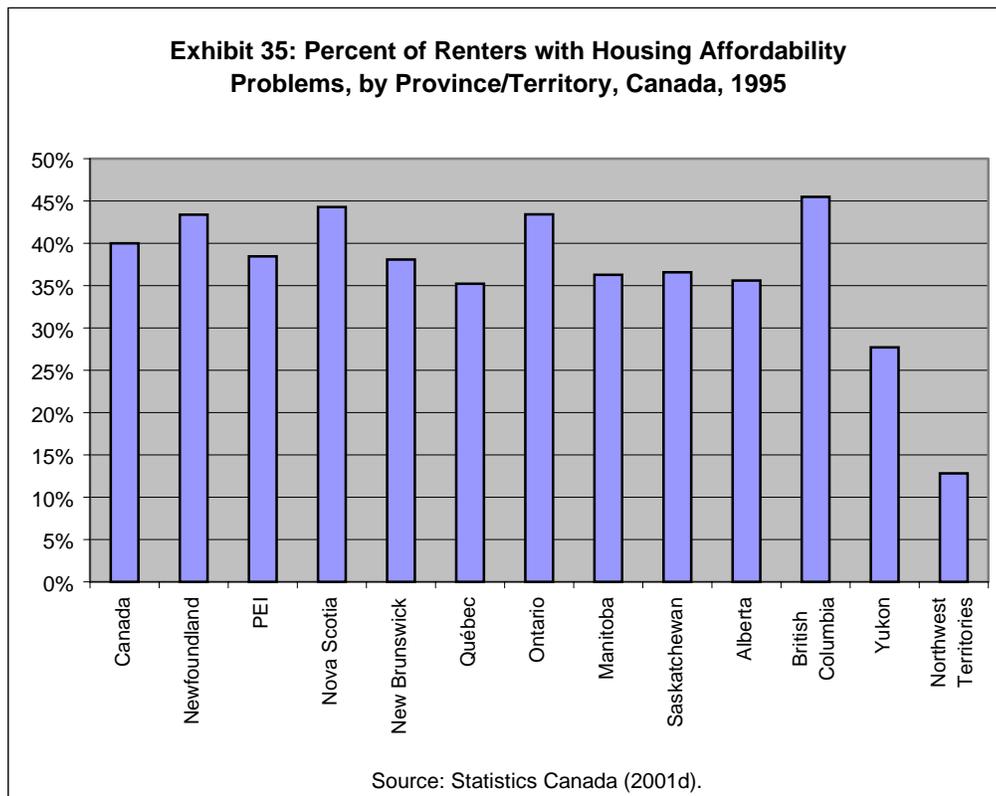
Many people believe that quality of life depends on having a clean, safe, affordable place to live. Sometimes the quality of housing has to be compromised because of high housing costs, which for many Canadians represents their largest monthly expenditure. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines a household as being in “core housing need” if any of the following criteria apply: 1) the residence requires major repairs, according to its residents; 2) it does not have enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the family; or 3) the shelter costs are more than 30 percent of the before-tax household income, and the household would need to spend in excess of 30 percent of its income to pay the average rent in the local market for a dwelling that would meet all of the above needs. In 1996, some 18 percent of Canadian households were in core housing need, an increase from 13 percent of households in 1991.

If people need to spend more than 30 percent of their family income to cover monthly gross rental or mortgage costs, then analysts generally characterize those in this situation as having an affordability problem. The problems of affordable housing are often more acute for non-owners — for example, the more than 2 million families who were living in renter-occupied dwellings in 1996. In contrast, less than 15 percent of the 5.7 million families living in owner-occupied dwellings spent more than 30 percent for their housing costs, according to Statistics Canada (2001f).

According to the 1996 Census, some 40 percent or more than 816,000 Canadian families living in rental housing had to spend at least 30 percent of their family income to cover their monthly housing costs. The proportions were highest in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Ontario. More than 43 percent of renters in these four provinces experienced these problems in 1996. No other province exceeded 38 percent of their renters having housing affordability problems.

The limited amount of available affordable housing appears to be a widespread problem in Canada, as the vacancy rates in most major Canadian cities were less than 2 percent in 2000 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation 2001). Tight rental markets and low annual rental completion rates (roughly one third the annual production rates of the early 1990s) during the late 1990s have meant that low-income renters will likely continue to experience housing affordability problems (Federation of Canadian Municipalities 2000). Nearly 85 percent of major urban centres experienced declines in vacancy rates between 1999 and 2000, with most experiencing parallel increases in the average costs of one- and two-bedroom apartments (see www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca).

The Bottom Line: Housing affordability problems were more prevalent among renters than homeowners, as approximately two in five renters spent 30 percent or more of their family incomes to pay their gross rent each month. Higher proportions of renters had housing affordability problems in British Columbia, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.



6. Community

Canadians live in communities that can vary dramatically in terms of size and diversity. Some prefer more rural locales, while others thrive in multicultural urban contexts. Whatever their personal preferences, most Canadians agree that their communities provide an important context within which to assess overall quality of life. The report card examines five areas that can be applied to communities everywhere:

- satisfaction with police, courts, prison and parole systems
- sense of personal safety
- crime rates
- level of civic involvement
- availability of programs and services

Satisfaction with Police, Courts, Prison and Parole Systems

General Social Survey (GSS) data reveal that attitudes toward local police are generally positive and have not changed over the past decade (Tufts 2000). The majority of Canadians in 1999 continued to view the local police as doing a good job of “being approachable” (64 percent), “ensuring the safety of citizens” (62 percent), “enforcing the laws” (60 percent) and “supplying information on reducing crimes” (54 percent). About half of Canadians considered that the police do a good job of responding promptly to calls. These figures are virtually identical to the responses offered in 1988, indicating that perceptions of policing have not changed in the last decade.

The Canadian public’s attitudes toward the criminal courts are less positive, however. In 1999, less than one in four respondents believed that the criminal courts were doing a good job of determining the guilt of the accused (21 percent), helping crime victims (15 percent), and providing justice quickly (13 percent). On the other hand, about 41 percent agreed that criminal courts helped to ensure a fair trial for the accused. These attitudes have not changed significantly since 1988 either.

With respect to the prison and parole systems, Canadians were somewhat more divided. Roughly a fifth of GSS respondents in 1999 did not know or did not attempt to evaluate the performances of the prison and parole systems. About 25 percent believed the prison system was doing a good job of supervising/controlling prisoners, while only 14 percent viewed the system as doing a good job of helping prisoners become law-abiding.

The public tended to hold similar views about the parole system, with fewer than one in five rating the system positively in terms of either releasing offenders who are not likely to re-offend (15 percent) or supervising offenders on parole (13 percent). Roughly one in three rated the system as average, while a comparable percentage described the parole system as doing a “poor job.”

Exhibit 36: Percent of Canadians Who Believe that the Criminal Justice System is Doing a Good Job, by Province, Canada, 1999											
	Canada	Nfld.	PEI	NS	NB	Qué.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	BC
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Local police are doing a good job at:											
• being approachable	66	76	76	73	72	66	65	64	66	67	67
• ensuring safety of citizens	62	71	73	64	67	71	61	58	55	61	52
• enforcing laws	60	63	63	61	62	67	60	54	47	59	53
• supplying info on reducing crime	54	65	58	57	57	59	51	50	51	54	53
• responding promptly to calls	49	56	59	54	57	58	45	44	39	45	46
Criminal courts are doing a good job at:											
• ensuring a fair trial for the accused	41	44	47	45	52	37	41	38	39	40	43
• determining guilt of the accused	21	29	29	23	31	24	20	18	17	18	17
• helping the victim	15	27	23	16	24	20	14	11	12	11	12
• providing justice quickly	13	25	19	12	22	16	12	10	11	9	9
The prison system is doing a good job at:											
• supervising/controlling prisoners	26	32	37	28	36	31	25	23	25	23	21
• helping prisoners become law abiding	14	25	20	15	25	21	12	10	11	10	10
The parole system is doing a good job at:											
• releasing offenders not likely to re-offend	15	20	24	16	21	26	12	11	12	12	9
• supervising offenders on parole	13	23	24	15	21	19	11	11	10	10	8
Source: Tufts (2000).											

At the provincial level, the most positive perceptions of the criminal justice system are found among those residing in the Atlantic provinces. Those living in Québec have relatively high ratings of the prison and parole systems, while the Ontario and British Columbia ratings of criminal courts mirror or exceed that of the general population in Canada. Those living in Western Canada, however, have more negative perceptions of the prison and parole systems compared to the rest of the nation.

Tufts (2000) determined that those living in rural areas, women, the elderly, those with less than a high school education, and people without recent victimization experiences tended to hold the most positive attitudes toward the police. In terms of the criminal courts, and the prison and parole systems, men, younger people aged 15-24, and those with less than a high school education had more positive assessments.

The Bottom Line: The public's views of the criminal justice system have not changed much over the past decade. The majority of Canadians across the country perceive the local police as doing a good job in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Canadians are somewhat less optimistic that the criminal courts will ensure fair trials or determine guilt adequately, while only a small minority believe that the system helps victims or provides justice in a timely fashion. Most Canadians do not perceive that the prison and parole systems function adequately, and these views are even more negative in Western Canada.

Sense of Personal Safety

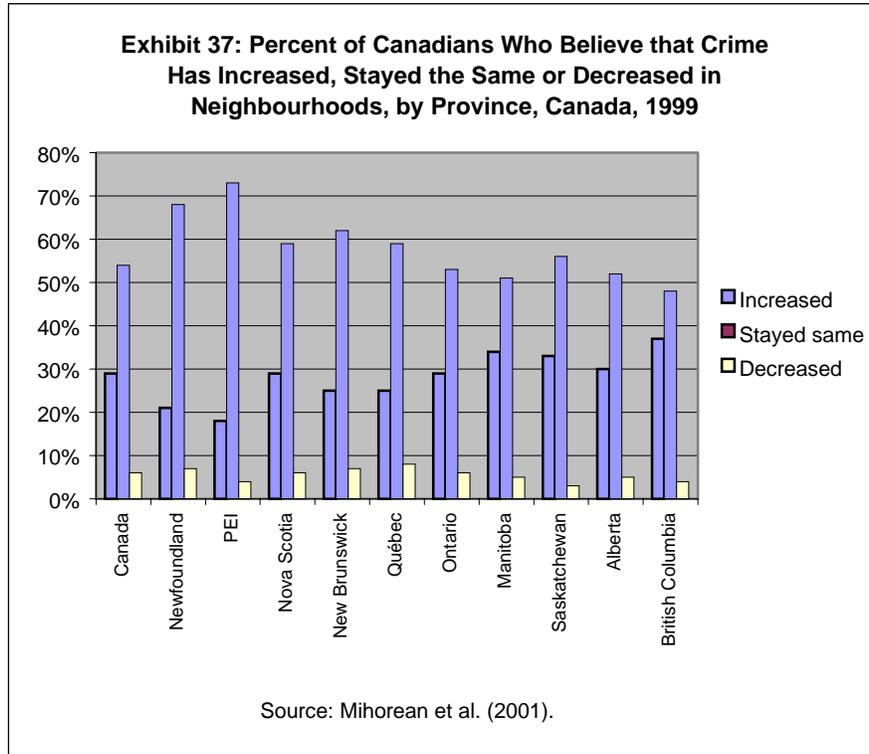
The GSS also posed questions dealing with the public's sense of personal safety (Statistics Canada 2001b). In 1999, some 43 percent of respondents reported feeling "very safe" while walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark. Another 45 percent stated that they felt reasonably safe, with the remainder feeling either somewhat or very unsafe. These figures are comparable to those from the 1993 survey (Ogg 2001). In addition, four out of five stated that they felt "not at all worried" about crime while alone in their homes in the evening or at night, while the remainder said they felt "somewhat worried."

Mihorean et al. (2001) discuss in detail the latest findings from the GSS dealing both with perceptions of crime and self-reported rates of victimization. The evidence suggests that men and women differ markedly with respect to their feelings of safety. While 94 percent of males felt safe from crime when walking alone in the dark, the figure drops to 82 percent among females. Similarly, some 88 percent of men were not at all worried while home alone as compared with 71 percent of the women.

Finally, most people (54 percent) believe that crime rates have stayed the same over the past five years in their neighbourhoods, while 29 percent believe there has been an increase and 6 percent believe that local crime has decreased. Only 8 percent agreed that, compared to other neighbourhoods, crime was higher in their own communities. These figures do not differ significantly by gender.

The Bottom Line: Perceptions of personal safety did not really change during the 1990s, although women continued to express higher rates of concern than men. Most people believe that

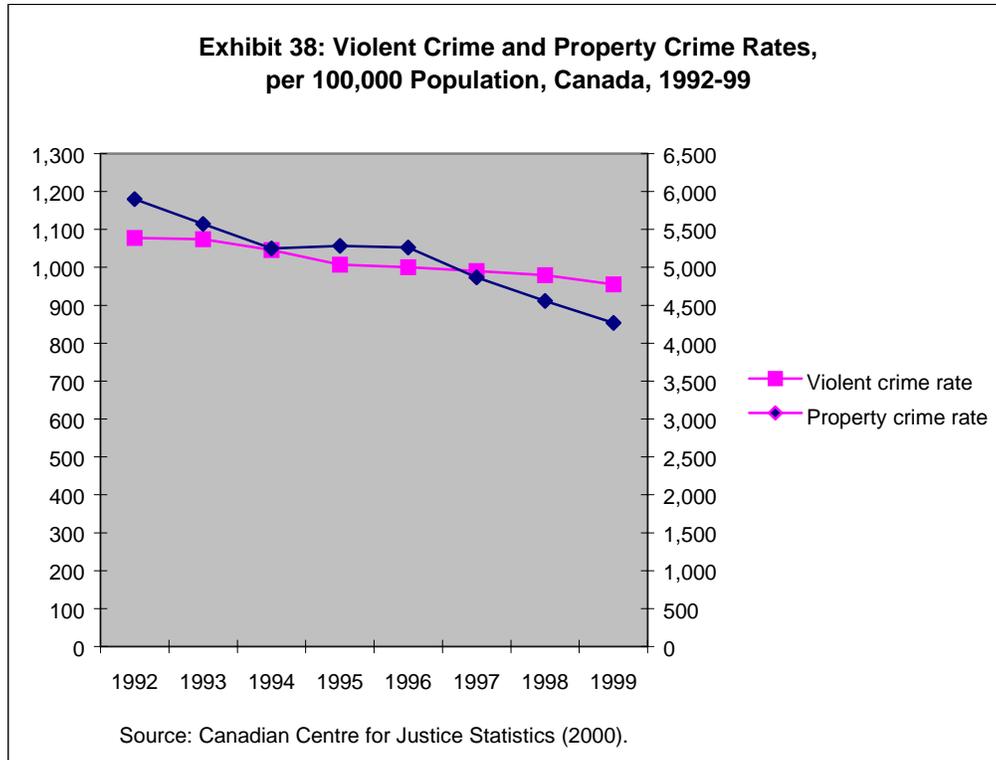
crime rates have not changed much in their neighbourhoods. However, three in ten Canadians believe that crime has gotten worse where they live, and this perception is higher in Western Canada.



Crime Rates

The official crime rates provide an “objective” counterbalance to the subjective perceptions that Canadians have with respect to their sense of personal safety. The annual fluctuation in crime rates provides a composite measure of safety and security for communities as a whole, thus becoming a key dimension of public policy debates. Although much crime never gets reported, any decline in official crime rates tends to produce a positive reaction.

In Canada, the evidence reveals that official crime rates declined throughout the 1990s. The violent crime rate actually declined every single year from 1992-99, while the property crime rate declined almost every year. Thus, the violent crime rate of 955 crimes per 100,000 population in 1999 represents the lowest rate for the entire decade (a decrease of 11 percent since 1992). Similarly, the property crime rate of 4,266 such crimes per 100,000 population reflects a lower rate than at any other time during the 1990s.



At the regional level, the violent crime rate continued to be highest in the Western provinces, particularly in the Prairies. These rates were lower than the national average in Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, while Québec had the lowest violent crime rate in the country.

In terms of property crimes, British Columbia led the country, followed by the Prairies and Alberta. The rates in Ontario and Québec tended to be much lower than the Western provinces, while the Atlantic provinces had the lowest rates of property crime.

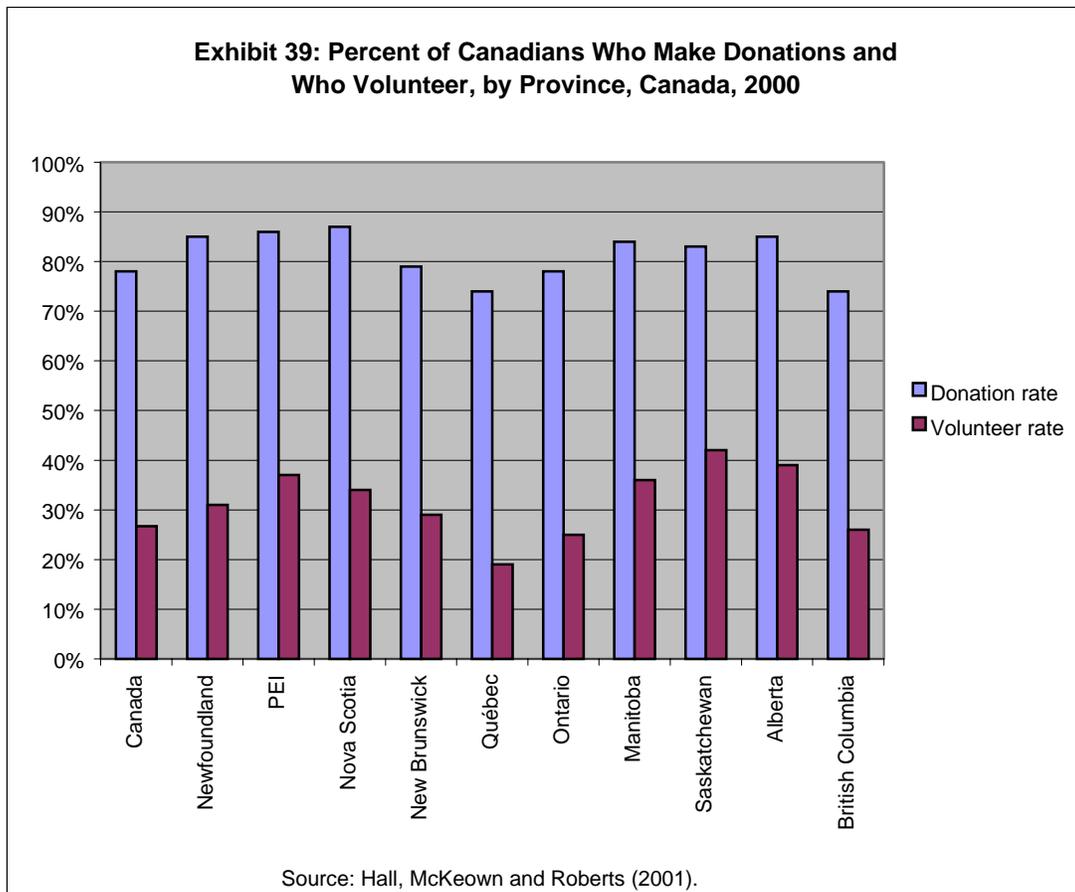
The Bottom Line: The official crime rates for both violent crime and property crime dropped steadily throughout the 1990s. The Western provinces tended to have higher rates of both types of crime, while Québec had the lowest violent crime rate and the Atlantic provinces had the lowest property crime rates.

Level of Civic Involvement

The level of civic involvement constitutes yet another indicator of community that can be measured in a variety of ways. The degree of political participation, as measured by voting behaviour during elections, has already been discussed. Other types of civic involvement include volunteering behaviour, charitable contributions, and participation in different types of community organizations and groups. The 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating addresses each of these issues (Hall, McKeown and Roberts 2001).

With respect to volunteering, the data indicate that the proportion of Canadians volunteering in the year 2000 (26.7 percent) declined significantly from 1997 (31.4 percent), the last year observed. In fact, the volunteer participation rate in 2000 mirrored the national figure from 1987. The average hours that Canadians volunteered, however, has increased by 13 hours annually, which translates into 549,000 full-time equivalent jobs. At the provincial level, the volunteer rates were highest in the Prairie provinces and lowest in Québec.

In terms of donation rates, the evidence indicates a national rate of 78 percent in 2000, unchanged from three years earlier. The average donation, however, increased by about 8 percent to \$259 per person in 2000. The donation rates across the country are generally at least 75 percent or higher, with the Atlantic provinces leading the way, followed by the Prairies. As with volunteer rates, Québec had the lowest donation rate in 2000 while British Columbia had the second lowest rate.



The Bottom Line: Although volunteer rates declined in the past three years, the donation rates were more stable. The actual amount of volunteer time and the total donations increased per capita, thus offsetting the declining participation rates. The Prairie provinces had the highest volunteer rates in 2000, while the Atlantic provinces had the highest proportions of those making donations. Québec had the lowest rates of volunteerism and donations, followed by British Columbia and Ontario.

Availability of Programs and Services

Many agree that the availability of programs and services should factor into broad-based assessment of quality of life. In fact, some of the public dialogue participants suggested that local programs were vital to maintaining vibrant, inclusive communities — especially for seniors and potentially marginalized groups. In addition, recent publications on youth and recreation from Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) and the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) have documented that participation in structured activities (i.e., activities that take place outside the family which involve elements of instruction, choice and skill development) appears to play an important role in fostering active citizenship, social inclusion, physical and psychological health, self-esteem and better grades in school — outcomes that contribute to the quality of life a society enjoys (Beauvais 2001; CPRN and CCSD 2001).

Unfortunately, no such routine or standardized measures of the availability of programs and services exist at the national level. Since programs and services tend to be delivered at the local community level, the task of constructing such a measure would be quite enormous indeed. The evidence of reduced transfer payments at the federal level and reduced funding at the provincial level, however, suggests that local programs and services may have declined during the 1990s. A fair amount of editorial ink has been spilled over the argument that government cutbacks have hurt local service providers. Some empirical research supports these claims as well, such as a survey of service providers for newcomers in Metropolitan Toronto (George and Michalski 1996). In future, for example, the work of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2001) may prove to be particularly fruitful as the analysts continue to develop their “social infrastructure” measures at the community level.

7. Personal Well-Being

In reflecting upon the quality of life in Canada, Canadians often emphasize the importance of enhancing their sense of personal well-being. In fact, nearly every public dialogue discussion delved into issues such as time constraints or balance, social interactions, leisure opportunities, a sense of personal or financial security, healthy diets and/or a sense of self-respect. Most people recognize these factors, which directly describe their personal circumstances, as intertwined with and contributing to overall quality of life. From the public dialogue discussions, the following three dimensions are considered as being the most relevant for the current report card:

- personal time stress
- degree of social interaction or isolation
- sense of personal financial security

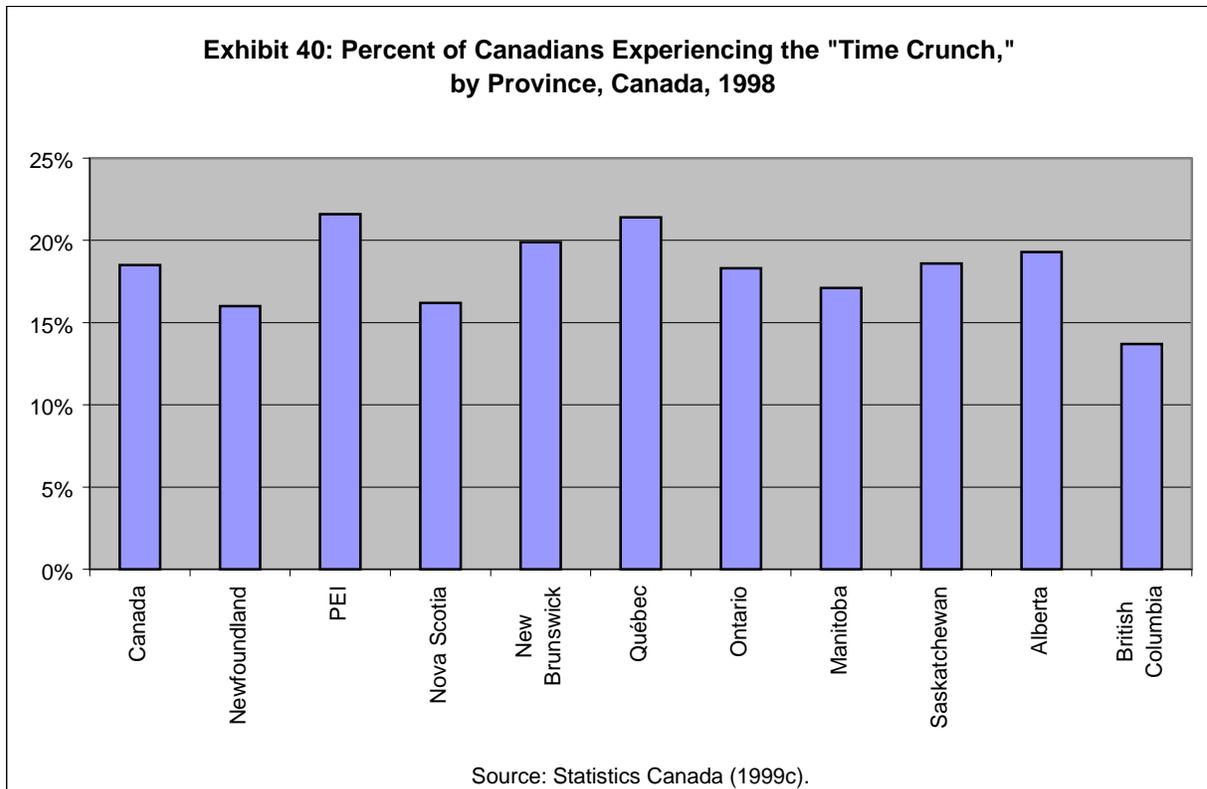
Personal Time Stress

As Frederick and Fast (2001, 8) have argued in a recent study of time constraints and pressures, “many Canadians feel they just don’t have time to accommodate both paid and unpaid work.” In particular, the 1998 General Social Survey determined that parents in the majority of families with children under 15 years of age reported feeling rushed everyday, and that nearly two thirds reported feeling more rushed now than compared to five years ago (Vanier Institute of the Family 2000). A great many Canadians thus have expressed concerns about coping with the “time crunch” or the “struggle to juggle.”

The Statistics Canada data on time use provides an interesting measure of personal time stress. The respondents were deemed to be time-stressed if they agreed with seven out of ten questions designed to measure whether people perceived themselves as having insufficient time to accomplish what they needed to do on a daily basis. By such a measure, some 18.5 percent of the general population aged 15 and older were time-stressed in 1998, while about 14 percent perceived themselves as time-stressed in 1992.

The proportions of time-stressed individuals vary to some extent by province, though the differences are not that dramatic. Prince Edward Island and Québec had the highest percentages of time-stressed adults (more than 21 percent), while British Columbia had the lowest rate at 13.7 percent. The more compelling pattern relates to gender: whereas 21 percent of Canadian women reported the time crunch in 1998, the same was true for only about 16 percent of men. The gender gap was the widest in Manitoba, with 21 percent of women and only 13 percent of men reporting a time crunch. The time crunch tended to be worse for both men *and* women between the ages of 25-44.

The Bottom Line: The percentage of Canadians feeling time-stressed increased in the 1990s by about one third to 18.5 percent in 1998. More women than men report being time-stressed.



Degree of Social Interaction or Isolation

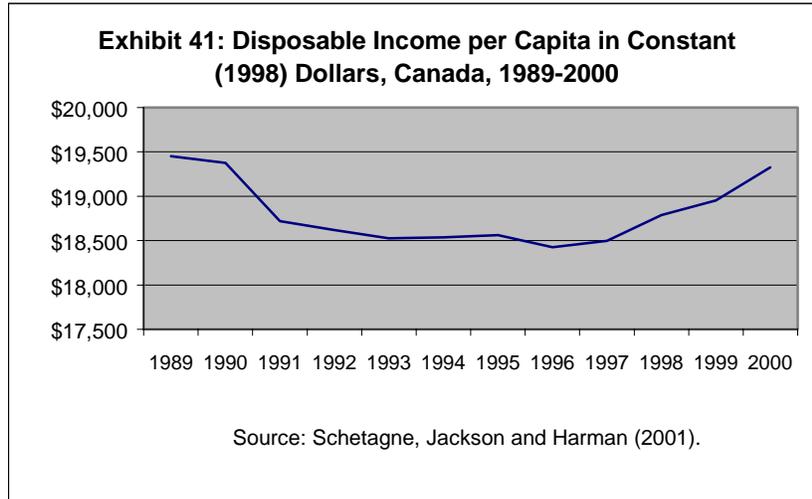
The research has shown that social support can be an important buffer in helping to cope with stress and prevent illness. In 1998-99, the National Population Health Survey (NPHS) examined the degree to which Canadians have access to various types of social support, including tangible assistance, feeling loved, emotional support and personal interactions. More than 75 percent of Canadians aged 12 and older reported having someone available to provide various types of social support. Roughly four in five Canadians reported having someone available most or all of the time for the purpose of general social interaction, such as to get together for relaxation, or to have a good time, or to help get one's mind off things (Statistics Canada 2001g).

The Bottom Line: Obtaining high quality data on the degree of social interaction or isolation at the national and provincial levels has proven to be difficult. According to recent measures of the NPHS, however, most Canadians have access to a variety of social supports, friendships and family networks. Whether the trends are moving in the direction of less social integration or more fragmented support systems remains to be seen.

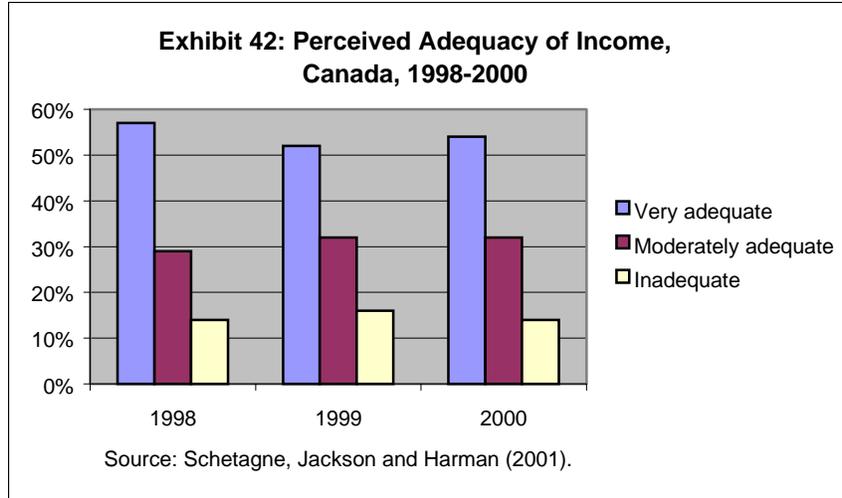
Sense of Personal Financial Security

The idea of personal financial security refers to the sense that individuals and family households have a stable standard of living and sufficient economic resources to attend to their various basic needs and commitments. One such measure focuses on the objective element, or the amount of

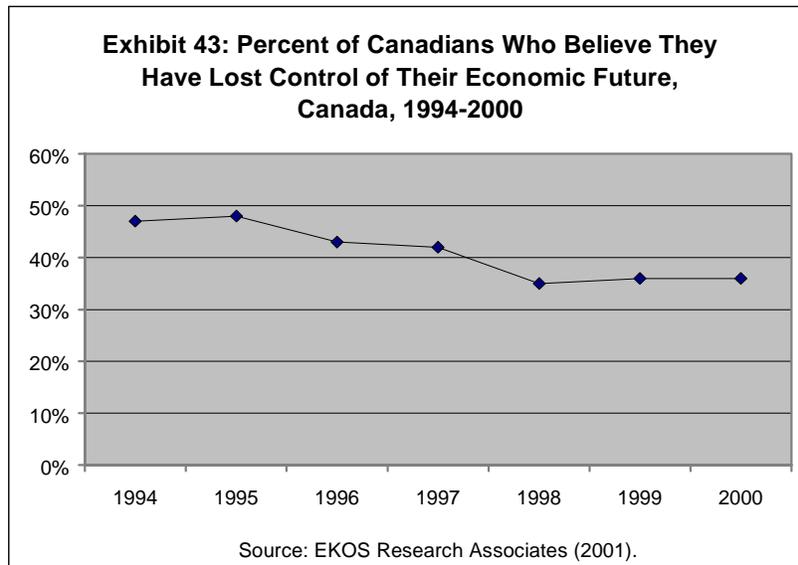
disposable income available. Schetagne, Jackson and Harman (2001) have calculated estimates of average disposable income per capita over the past decade. The results indicate that the figure for calendar year 2000 (\$19,325) is nearly identical to that for 1990. Thus, despite a downward trend in disposable income during the first half of the 1990s, the economic growth of the late 1990s produced higher levels of disposable income.



At a more subjective level, what do Canadians think about the adequacy of their incomes? In the year 2000, more than half the population (54 percent) believed their incomes to be “very adequate” for meeting their various needs, while 16 percent deemed their income “inadequate” (Schetagne, Jackson and Harman 2001). These figures were similar to responses for the two previous years. The Atlantic provinces and Québec tended to view their incomes as less adequate on average compared to other regions, while those living in Ontario had the highest percentage of incomes rated as “very adequate” (59 percent).



A related measure tracks the extent to which Canadians perceive themselves as having control over their economic future. EKOS Research Associates (2001) have examined the issue on a regular basis since 1994, indicating that a greater sense of optimism has emerged with the economic recovery of the 1990s. By the late 1990s, the percentage who believed that they had lost control over their economic future had declined to slightly more than one in three Canadians.



The Bottom Line: The objective measures of personal financial security confirmed that Canadians’ disposable income levels rose through the latter half of 1990s, such that the 2000 figures were comparable to a decade earlier. While the majority continued to view their incomes as very adequate, roughly one in six Canadians viewed their incomes as inadequate for meeting their basic needs. Similarly, the proportion of Canadians who believed that they had lost control of their economic futures has declined since the early and mid-1990s.

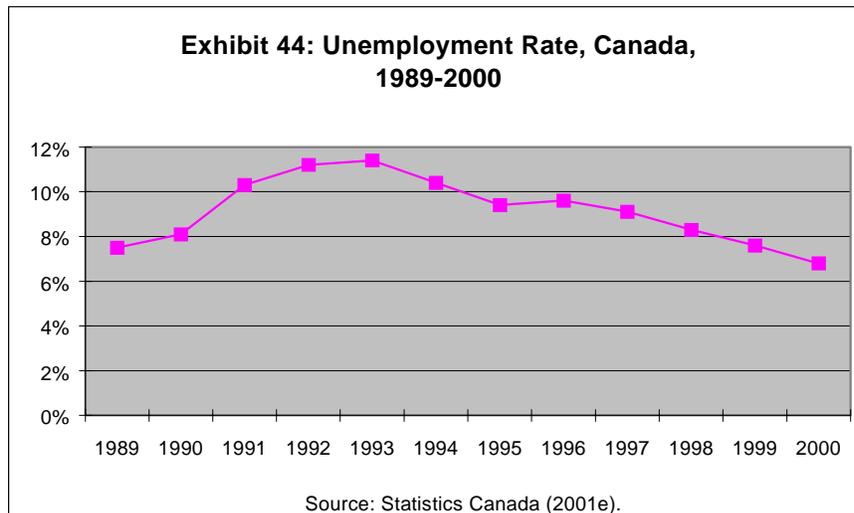
8. Economy and Employment

The economy often ranks in the top five in general polls about the most important issues or concerns among the general public. The consensus seems to be that a healthy economy and opportunities to secure and maintain employment are vital quality of life issues. The traditional measure of economic progress, growth in Gross Domestic Product, provides too limited a perspective on what Canadians consider to be genuinely important. The public dialogue discussions encompassed a range of relevant issues to the economic theme, of which the following have been selected:

- unemployment and employment rates
- involuntary part-time workers
- job security and satisfaction
- commercial bankruptcies
- income distribution
- consumer debt levels

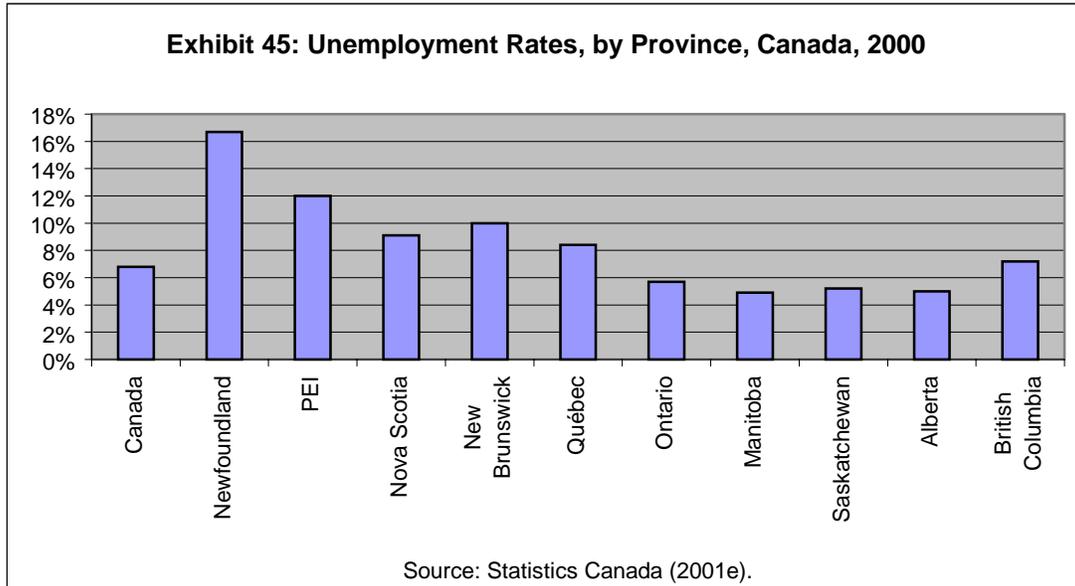
Unemployment and Employment Rates

The unemployment rate serves as the starting point for many who consider the economy a vital aspect of the quality of life. In the early 1990s, Canada experienced a serious recession that pushed unemployment rates into double digits for several years. But, by the late 1990s, a strong economic recovery helped reduce the unemployment rate to a 20-year low of 6.8 percent in 2000.



By 2000, the Prairie provinces witnessed the steepest drops in unemployment rates, with averages rates around 5 percent. Ontario rebounded quite well from the recession, boasting an unemployment rate of 5.7 percent, while British Columbia stood at 7.2 percent and Québec at 8.4

percent in 2000. The highest unemployment rates continue to be found among the Atlantic provinces, which have historically had higher unemployment rates linked in part to the seasonal nature of much of the work in the region. In 2000, however, Newfoundland continued to exceed all other provinces with a rate of 16.7 percent (the lowest rate since 1989).

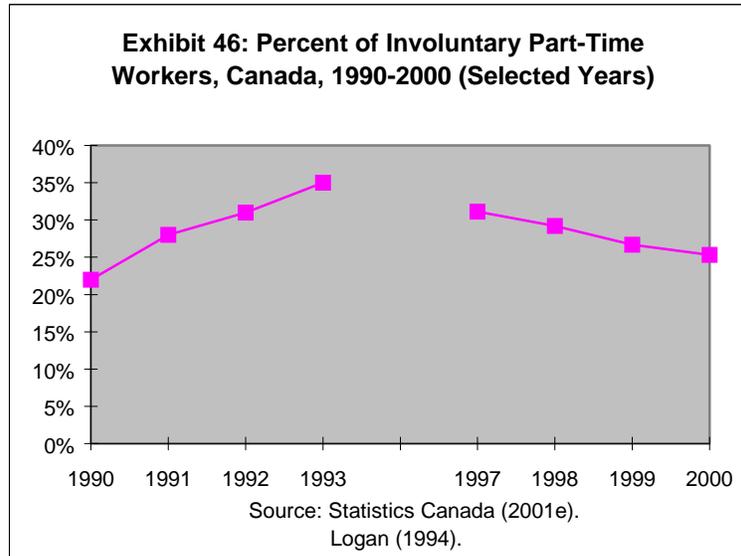


The Bottom Line: The national unemployment rate increased sharply during the recession years of the early 1990s, followed by a steady decline to a 20-year low of less than 7 percent in 2000. The Atlantic provinces continue to have the highest unemployment rates in Canada, followed by Québec and British Columbia.

Involutionary Part-Time Workers

Many people prefer to work part time to accommodate their schedules and a variety of personal demands. These workers can be thought of as part-timers “by choice.” Others who work part time would rather be employed full time, but the current job market may not offer the right opportunities. The latter group describes the “involutionary part-timers.” Any increase in involutionary part-timers arguably detracts from the quality of life.

Detailed historical data on the reasons for part-time work point to a sharp increase in involutionary part-time work during the early 1990s, from 22 percent at the beginning of the decade to 35 percent by 1993. As the economy recovered, however, the percentage of involutionary part-timers decreased and has continued to decrease each of the last four years in particular. In 2000, the figure stood at 25 percent, representing the lowest level in the last decade.



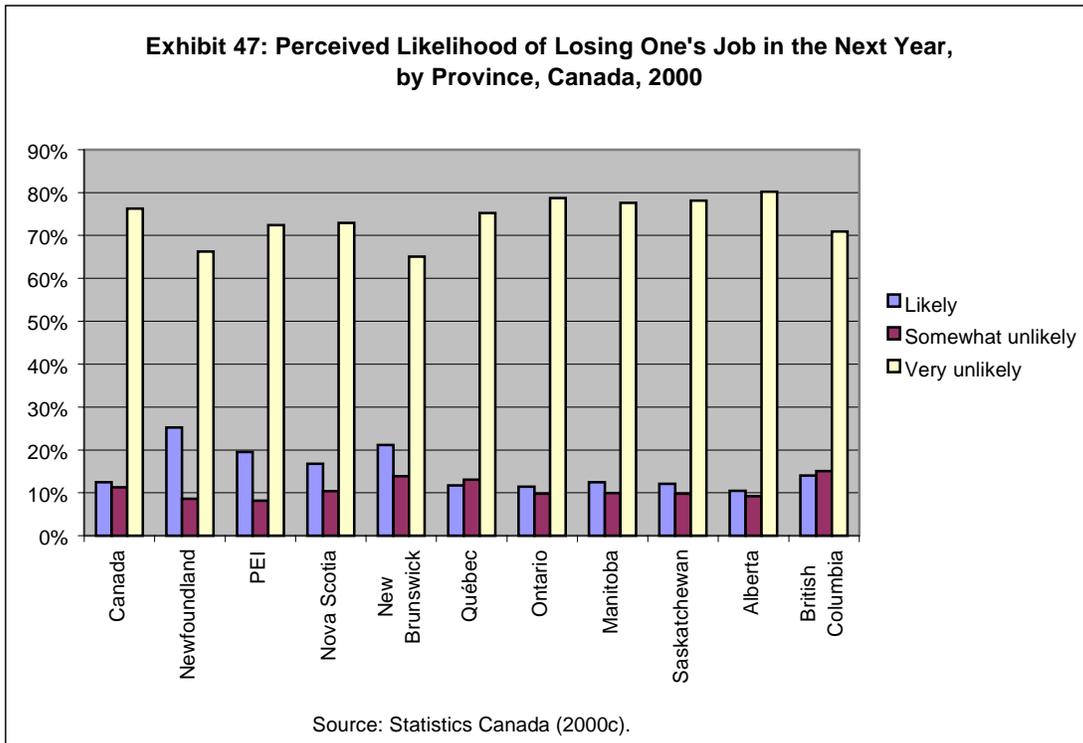
The Bottom Line: The percentage of involuntary part-time workers often mirrors the broader economic trends. For example, the increased number of involuntary part-timers during the early 1990s reflected the downturn in the economy. During the latter half of the 1990s, the percentage of involuntary part-time workers decreased steadily each year as the economy improved, even though the rates were still higher than a decade earlier.

Job Security and Satisfaction

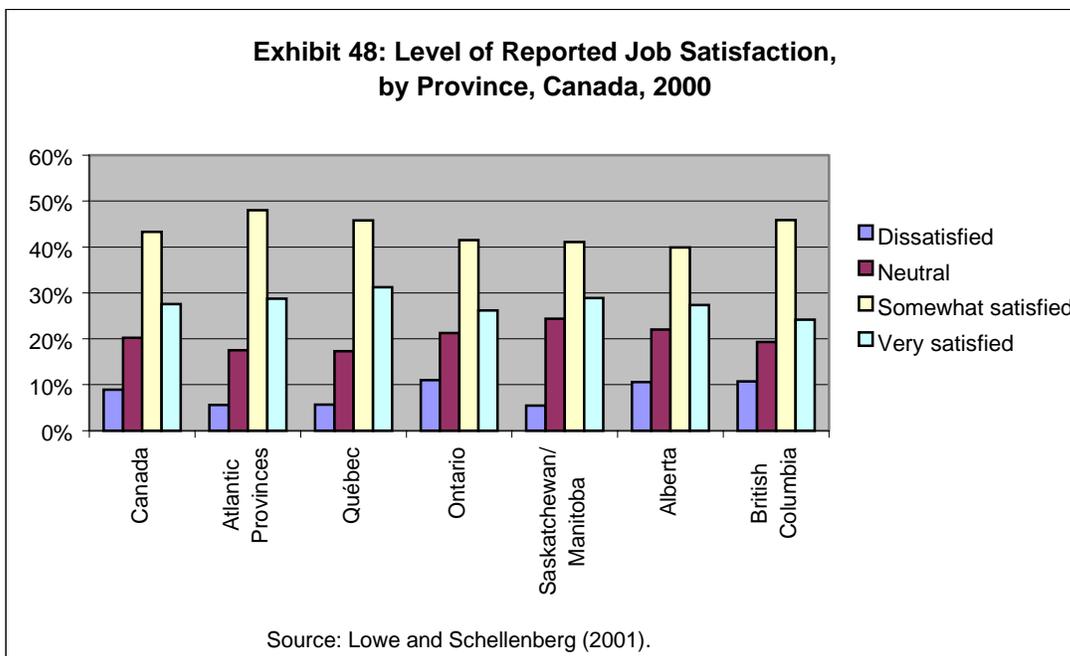
Canadians tend to agree that job security and the quality of work matters to their overall quality of life (Lowe 2000). For most people, the perception of job security reinforces a more general sense of stability and contributes to a sense of economic well-being. To be concerned about losing one's job often produces stress or elicits a sense of gnawing insecurity about life in general. As a result, job security clearly reflects an important quality of life dimension.

The 2000 General Social Survey data examined in part whether respondents perceived themselves as very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely or very unlikely to be laid off in the next year. More than 75 percent of Canadians identified the possibility of losing their jobs as "very unlikely," while another 11 percent stated that it was "somewhat unlikely." One in eight Canadians believed there was a likely possibility that they might lose their job in the next year.

At the regional level, however, the data indicate that the residents of the Atlantic provinces were far more inclined to view layoffs as imminent, particularly in Newfoundland. British Columbia had a higher rate of job insecurity than the Canadian average, while the other provinces tended to fall slightly below the national average. Stated differently, at least 70 percent of residents living in each province outside of the Atlantic region perceived themselves as having job security.



With respect to job satisfaction, more than 70 percent of Canadians reported a general satisfaction with their work. The residents of the Atlantic provinces and Québec reported the highest levels of satisfaction with their jobs, while those living in Alberta and Ontario expressed slightly lower levels of job satisfaction.



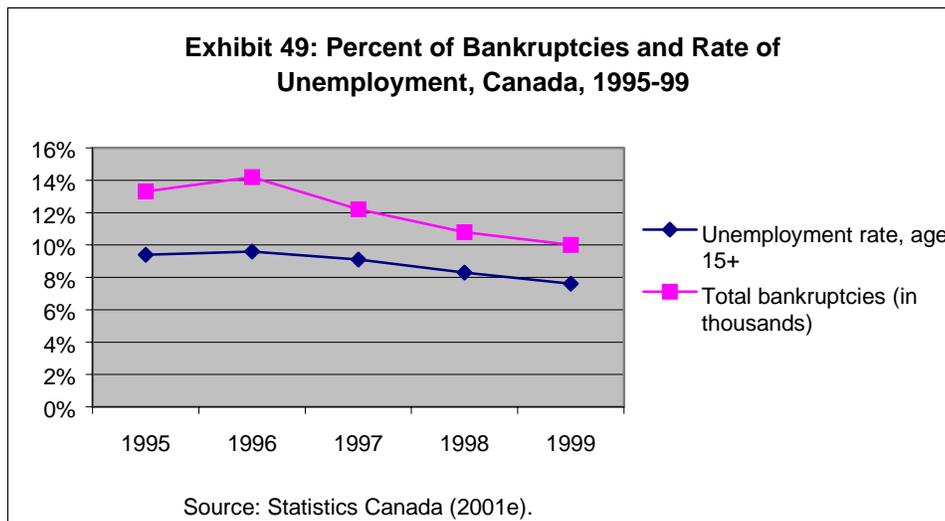
Recent evidence indicates, however, that the proportion of workers in medium and large Canadian organizations who express “high” job satisfaction has declined from 62 percent in 1990 to 45 percent in 1999 (Duxbury and Higgins 2001). The parallel development has been a doubling in the percentage of those currently reporting high job stress (27 percent) as compared with the figures from 1990 (13 percent).

The Bottom Line: Nearly three in four Canadians reported having job security and being at least somewhat satisfied in their current work. Residents of the Atlantic provinces were more concerned about losing their jobs and, among those who had jobs, were more satisfied overall with their work (along with Québec) than elsewhere in Canada. The overall trend in recent years seems to be an improvement in perceived job security (see Schetagne, Jackson and Harman 2001). Job satisfaction rates have been fairly consistent over the years, although some recent survey data indicate an overall decline among those who report high job satisfaction and an increase among those reporting high job stress.

Commercial Bankruptcies

Another sign of increased economic health can be captured in a “negative” indicator: the number of commercial bankruptcies. The most prominent sectors experiencing bankruptcies include retail trade, construction, lodging and food services, and all other service industries, which account for more than 60 percent of declared commercial bankruptcies in any given year.

The Exhibit below maps commercial bankruptcies and the unemployment rate during the second half of the 1990s. As expected, these trends parallel one another over the period of observation.



The absolute number of bankruptcies and the unemployment rate remained high in the mid-1990s, including 14,229 commercial bankruptcies in 1996. The bankruptcies decreased by 14 percent the next year, followed by another 13 percent decline to 1998. By 1999, total commercial bankruptcies had declined to just over 10,000 — a 30 percent reduction in just three years. In

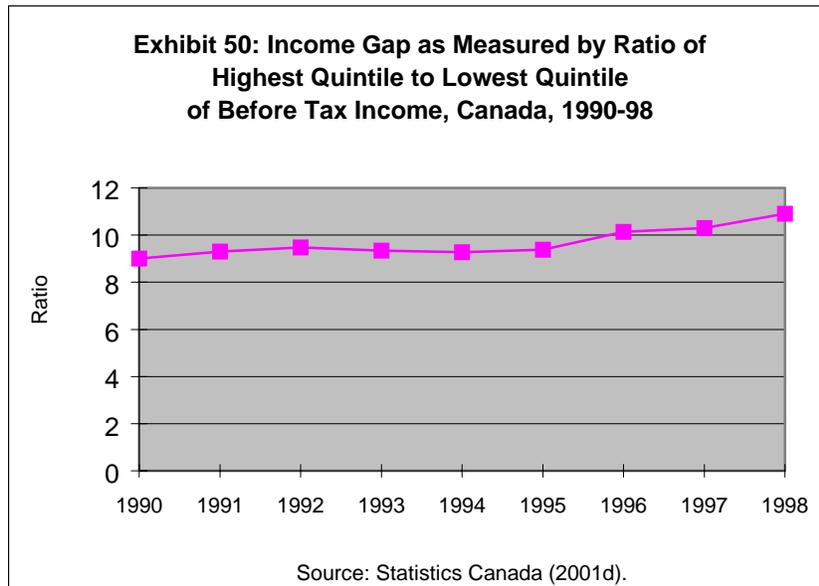
addition, every industry *except* “oil wells, mining and quarrying” and “logging and forestry” experienced an absolute decline in declared bankruptcies over the past five years.

The Bottom Line: The decline in commercial bankruptcies largely mirrors the broader economic recovery of the late 1990s, with a 30 percent decline in total bankruptcies from 1995-99.

Income Distribution

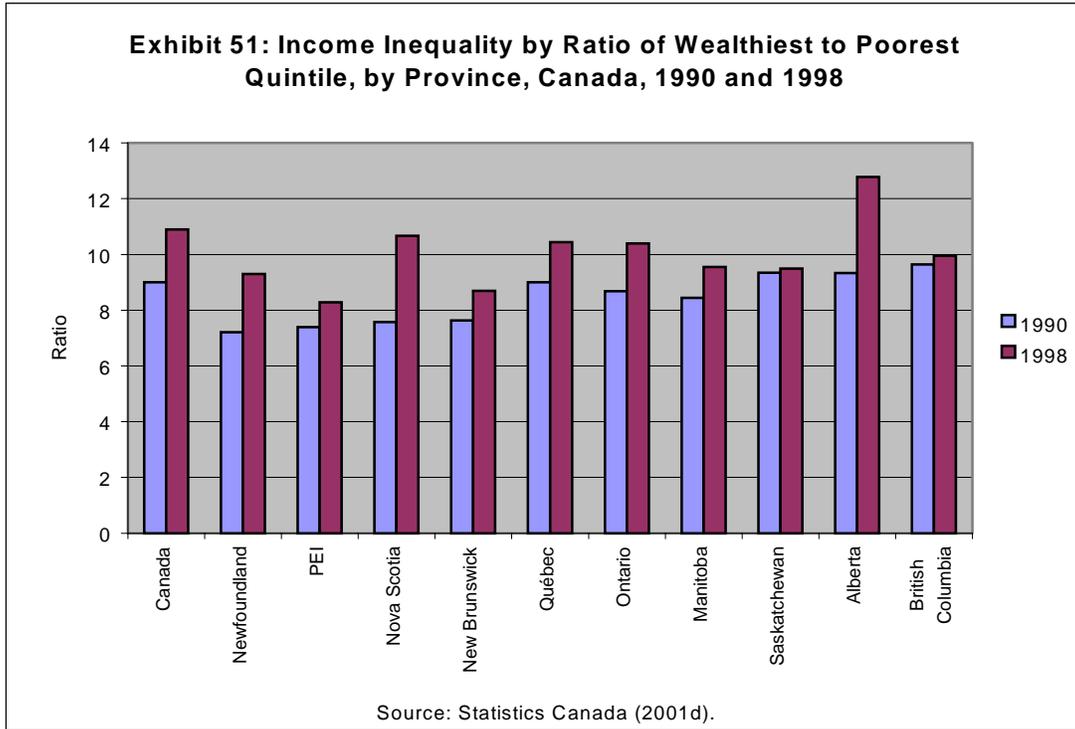
For many Canadians, fairness and equity demand that wealth and income should not be concentrated in the hands of only a few privileged families. While most would not begrudge their neighbours or family members the opportunity to increase their economic well-being, Canadians are concerned about the perceived growing gap between the rich and the poor within the country. An examination of income distribution offers a glimpse into the extent of inequality that exists between the wealthy and the least fortunate in the country.

Statistics Canada routinely publishes data on income distributions, broken down into five quintiles showing that share of the before tax income controlled by the wealthiest 20 percent, followed by each successive group. The ratio of the top quintile divided by the poorest quintile describes the income gap in a straightforward way. If the ratio increases, then that suggests a widening gap. The data, in fact, point to a growing gap between the rich and the poor in Canada over the 1990s. In 1990, the income gap ratio stood at exactly 9.0 (meaning that the richest 20 percent controlled nine times more income than the poorest 20 percent). This gap then rose slightly during the early 1990s and began to accelerate in the late 1990s, so that by 1998 the income gap ratio stood at 10.9.



The income gap ratios widened across every province in Canada over the 1990s, although they increased only marginally in Saskatchewan and British Columbia. Once again, some regional variations are noteworthy. Alberta stood out easily as having the largest income gap ratio in

Canada at 12.8 in 1998. The next three provinces with the largest income gap ratios are Nova Scotia, Québec and Ontario, with ratios that hovered around 10.5. The other Atlantic provinces had the smallest income gap ratios, while the other Western provinces (not including Alberta) tended to be slightly below the national rate as well.



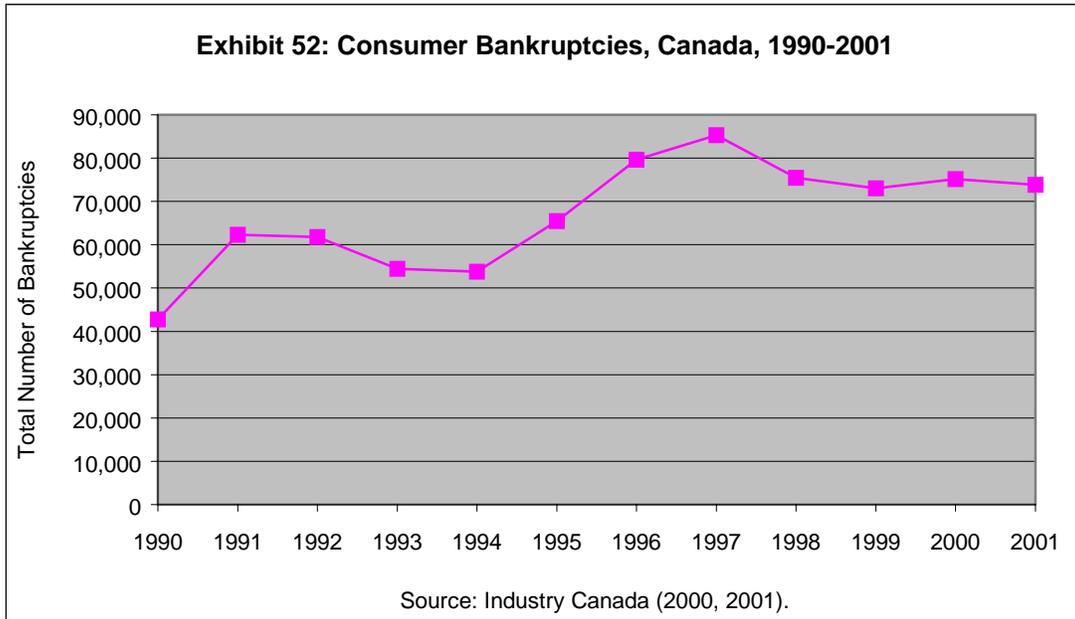
The Bottom Line: The perception of a growing gap between the rich and the poor has been confirmed, as the wealthiest 20 percent of the population significantly increased their share of the before tax income during the latter half of the 1990s. This growing disparity can be observed in every province, although the highest level of income inequality exists in Alberta.

Consumer Debt Levels

Just as Canadians have expressed concerns about government debt levels and deficits in the public dialogue discussions and in opinion polls, some are concerned about personal or consumer debt levels. High levels of personal debt can compromise quality of life, particularly if one has to choose between meeting debt obligations and obtaining the basic necessities such as housing and heating costs. While reliable data are not readily available on consumer debt levels in Canada, recent evidence suggests that debt payments now consume more than 14 percent of take-home pay in the United States (Chevreau, 2002).

In Canada, the closest proxy for consumer debt levels appears to be that of personal bankruptcies, for which recent data are available from Industry Canada’s Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy (2000, 2001). The data indicate that the total number of personal

bankruptcies have waxed and waned over the 1990s, peaking at more than 85,000 in 1997. The three years thereafter leveled out at a figure of roughly 75,000 personal bankruptcies per year. The figures for 2001 will likely be higher, however, because by the end of November, nearly 74,000 Canadians had already declared personal bankruptcy.



The Bottom Line: Accurate measures of consumer debt are needed to reflect citizen preferences. In lieu of debt levels, the evidence on consumer bankruptcies suggests an uneven, upward trend during the 1990s.

9. Government

Canadians may disagree about the extent to which government should intrude upon their lives, but most view the government as having a role to play in helping to secure a better quality of life. Three indicators emerged from the public dialogue discussions as particularly relevant:

- public trust in government
- accountability and stewardship of public values
- public governance

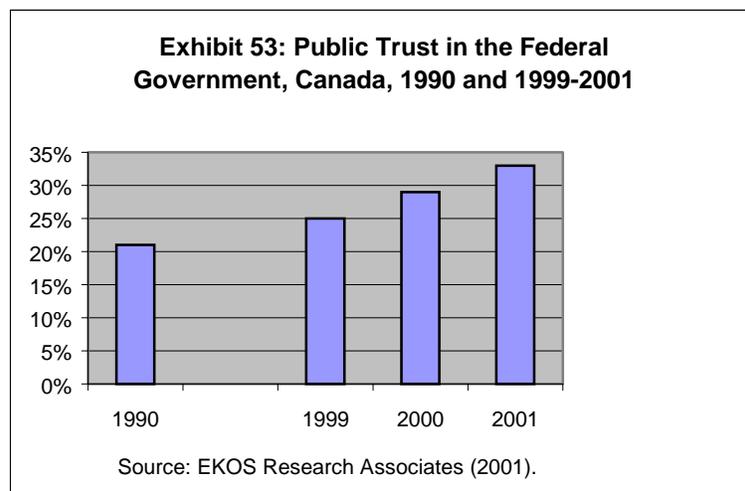
Of the nine theme areas however, these indicators are the least developed and have only been partially explored here, given the limited availability of data.

Public Trust in Government

As part of their World Values Survey, EKOS Research Associates (2001) asked the following question of a national sample of Canadians: “How much do you trust the government in Ottawa to do what is right?” The response has been somewhat more positive in recent years compared to 1990, when only 21 percent believed they could trust the federal government almost always or most of the time. Nearly one in three Canadians felt that way at the start of the new millennium.

Future analyses of public trust ideally will include similar questions asked of provincial governments. Further measures of public trust should be developed to tap into other dimensions of public trust in government.

The Bottom Line: Public trust in Canada’s federal government increased during the late 1990s.



Accountability and Stewardship of Public Values

Canadians in public dialogue groups clearly believed that governments at all levels should be accountable, fiscally responsible, and as efficient as possible in being responsive to the public interests in general. The measures available to assess accountability and stewardship of public values, however, are quite limited.

One dimension consists of the extent to which the public accepts the electoral process as legitimate. Canadians' belief in the fairness of the electoral system has apparently declined over the last decade. Research by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (O'Neil, 2001) shows that the proportion of those who are "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way federal elections work was lower in 2000 (30 percent) than in 1990 (41 percent). Moreover, the same research suggests that Canadians see themselves as having less influence over government decisions — those who agreed with the statement "People like me do not have much say over what the government does" increased from 59 percent in 1990 to 64 percent in 2000.

Additional data need to be gathered to assess more directly issues such as government accountability, fiscal responsibility (including perceptions of government waste), and responsiveness to public demands.

The Bottom Line: Canadians appear to be less satisfied with the electoral process and less inclined to believe that they have much input into what the government does. More measures need to be developed to tap into other dimensions of government accountability and stewardship of public values.

Public Governance

The idea of public governance refers more to the *quality* of the governance process, or the institutional capacity of governments to deliver on their promises. Unfortunately, measures to evaluate such quality are not well-developed and tend to focus more on the particular political leadership rather than the institution as a whole.

In Canada, the closest approximation consists of asking Canadians to assess the overall performance of their governments at the provincial level, such as the question posed in a recent Ipsos-Reid poll: "Generally speaking, would you say that you approve or disapprove of the overall performance of the current provincial government?" Just over half (51 percent) approved, while 44 percent disapproved, and the remainder stated that they did not know or were not sure. The problem, though, is that the responses to such a question are highly volatile and tend to be more focused on the political leader or party in power, rather than on the generic institution.

The Bottom Line: The theme of governance has the least developed sources of data available. On issues of public confidence in government performance, however, the evidence points to a generally favourable approval rating, although that varies across the provinces and can change quickly with the political climate. No other data are currently available that measure public governance in a manner consistent with what citizens deemed important.

III Conclusions

The report card has reviewed a tremendous range of materials, covering many different facets of life in Canada during the 1990s. But what does it all mean? What conclusions can be drawn about the quality of life in Canada? Have things improved over the last decade, or has the quality of life remained stagnant or even declined? This section considers these questions both by summarizing the overall results of the report card and by discussing further Canadians' views on quality of life in general. These final comments discuss the strengths and limitations of the approach, as well as possible future directions in monitoring the quality of life more broadly in Canada and at the community level.

Summary Results

With nine theme areas and more than 40 indicators in total, the results can be confusing. Consequently, the present summary concentrates on the national trends, even though progress may be faster or slower in any given area at the provincial level. In reviewing the nine theme areas, the indicators can be summarized to offer some interesting generalizations. While some may take issue with the measures or the interpretations, the fact that such an array of indicators reflecting citizen input can be stacked up in one place for comparative purposes provides a rather interesting opportunity to reflect upon the quality of life in Canada.

The data needed to respond to citizens' needs come from many sources and are calculated in many different ways. As a consequence, there is no single number that can summarize the quality of life for each indicator, or even each theme. However, the Overview for the 1990s, presented on the next two pages, provides a general indication of how we have fared in the 1990s with indicators given in three columns — Better, Worse or Mixed/No Change. A look at the Overview suggests that many important parts of quality of life did get better in the 1990s. In other cases, the trends are more mixed, and some where the quality deteriorated. For a few indicators, either no data were available or data were inadequate to draw any conclusions.

Although no thematic area offers a compelling case for clear and unequivocal progress, two in particular displayed clearly more positive changes during the 1990s for the majority of the indicators considered: health and employment/economy. Despite ongoing concerns about the viability of the health care system and certain access issues, Canadians continue to rate their health care system reasonably high on many issues. Slight improvement in self-reported health and mental health, declining suicide rates, and proportionately fewer smokers offer support for incremental gains in the quality of health among Canadians. Similarly, most of the indicators monitoring economic progress revealed positive changes during the latter half of the 1990s, including declining unemployment rates, involuntary part-time employees, fewer commercial bankruptcies, increased job security and stable job satisfaction. Only the growth in income inequality detracted from the overall optimistic portrait of a healthier economy. Whether or not the most recent slowdown or downturn in the economy has precipitous impacts in any or all of these areas in the next little while remains to be seen.

Exhibit 54: Quality of Life in Canada from 1990 to 2000: Report Card Overview

	Better	Mixed/ No Change	Worse
Democratic Rights and Participation			
1. Voting patterns — <i>Willingness to vote</i>			√
2. Tolerance of diversity — <i>Awareness of discrimination</i>			√
Health			
3. Quality of health care system — <i>Confidence in health care system</i>		√	
4. Physical health status — <i>Self-reported health</i>		√	
— <i>Disability-free life expectancy</i>	√		
5. Mental health status — <i>Risk of depression</i>	√		
— <i>Suicide rates</i>	√		
6. Lifestyle — <i>Smoking rates</i>	√		
Education/Learning			
7. Participation in primary and secondary education — <i>Pre-elementary enrolment rate</i>		√	
8. Educational attainment — <i>Highest level of education achieved by adults</i>	√		
9. Access to post-secondary education — <i>Full-time university enrolment rate</i>	√		
— <i>Costs</i>			√
10. Lifelong learning — <i>Adults participating in education/training</i>			√
11. Adult literacy — <i>Assessment of functional literacy</i>		√	
12. Youth literacy — <i>13-year-olds performance</i>		√	
— <i>16-year-olds performance</i>		√	
13. Quality of education system — <i>Pupil-educator ratio in elementary/secondary schools</i>		√	
Environment			
14. Air quality — <i>Index of air quality</i>			√
15. Water quality — <i>Municipal populations served by wastewater treatment facilities</i>	√		
16. Waste management — <i>Reused, recycled, discarded material</i>	√		
— <i>Non-hazardous waste disposed of per capita</i>	√		
17. Renewable energy sources — <i>Domestic demand for energy</i>		√	
18. Access to healthy outdoor green spaces*			
Social Programs and Conditions			
19. Low income rates — <i>Canadians living below the low income cut-offs</i>			√
20. Income supports for basic needs — <i>Provincial/territorial welfare schemes</i>			√
— <i>Social assistance for lone-parent families</i>			√

* No/poor data to support this indicator.

	Better	Mixed/ No Change	Worse
Social Programs and Conditions (cont.)			
21. Child care availability and affordability — <i>Regulated child care spaces</i>	√		
22. Living wages — <i>Proportion of working poor families</i>			√
23. Food bank usage — <i>Accessing emergency food programs</i>		√	
24. Housing affordability — <i>Problems among renters</i>			√
Community			
25. Satisfaction with police, courts, prison and parole systems — <i>Public perceptions</i>		√	
26. Sense of personal safety and crime rates — <i>Violent crime and property crime rates</i>	√		
27. Level of civic involvement — <i>Donation and volunteer rates</i>		√	
28. Availability of programs and services*			
Personal Well-Being			
29. Personal time stress — <i>Canadians experiencing the "time crunch"</i>			√
30. Degree of social interaction or isolation — <i>Access to social supports</i>		√	
31. Sense of personal financial security — <i>Perceived adequacy of income</i> — <i>Belief that control has been lost over personal economic future</i>	√	√	
Economy and Employment			
32. Unemployment and employment rates — <i>National unemployment rate</i>	√		
33. Involuntary part-time work — <i>Involuntary part-time workers</i>	√		
34. Job security and satisfaction — <i>Perceived likelihood of losing one's job in the next year</i> — <i>Job satisfaction</i>	√	√	
35. Commercial bankruptcies — <i>Number of commercial bankruptcies</i>	√		
36. Income/wealth distribution — <i>Income inequality</i>			√
37. Consumer debt levels — <i>Consumer bankruptcies</i>			√
Government			
38. Public trust — <i>Trust in federal government*</i>	√		
39. Accountability and stewardship of public values — <i>Satisfaction with electoral process and belief that citizens have input into what government does*</i>			√
40. Public governance — <i>Public confidence in government performance*</i>			

* No/poor data to support this indicator.

Several thematic areas showed promising signs for some indicators, but negative results for others: personal well-being, the environment, education and government. The increased perception of economic security almost certainly enhanced personal well-being for many Canadians, while most enjoyed widespread access to social support networks that further enhanced their quality of life. One issue that appears to be worsening for Canadians concerns time stress, as more reported feeling the time crunch than in the early 1990s.

Some of the environmental indicators suggest that there have been improvements, especially the significant increases in recycling and reuse rates, as well as the decline in the volume of waste disposal per capita. Air quality improved during the first half of the decade, but has worsened in recent years. The lack of standardized measures of water quality creates serious difficulties for anyone interested in presenting a broad Canadian indicator, although public concerns about water and air quality alike have, if anything, increased in recent years. The spate of groundwater contamination sites that have been identified in recent years has heightened awareness and concern about this issue.

In education, educational attainment rates continue to climb higher in Canada, with high school completion rates and post-secondary enrolment rates rising in the 1990s. Pre-school enrolment has not changed much. Adult and youth literacy rates offer mixed results, with some improvements and some declines. In addition, a higher pupil-educator ratio may compromise, to some extent, the quality of education in Canada. Finally, while the increasing costs of tuition and student debts may hamper access to further education, adult education participation declined slightly during the 1990s as well.

The measures of government are among the weakest, with only questions of trust tapping directly into any of the three sub-themes. Although trust in government appeared to bottom out by the early 1990s, in recent years the trend appears to be swinging back in the other direction as more Canadians voiced support for or trust in the federal government. A slight majority of Canadians approved of their provincial government's performance.

Three thematic areas that tended to point more decisively toward the negative included the state of democracy, social programs/conditions and the community. Only two indicators assessed democratic participation and diversity in the current report card, but both pointed in a negative direction. On the one hand, Canadians continued to retreat from voting in general elections. And, on the other hand, the perception that some groups are discriminated against has increased over the last several years.

With respect to social programs and conditions, the news was almost entirely negative. The low income rates for the general population, as well as those for children, tended to increase through most of the 1990s. At the same time, income supports available to low-income individuals and families with children became less adequate. The proportion of working poor increased as well. Perhaps not surprisingly under these conditions, food bank usage climbed through the 1990s, and housing affordability continued to be a problem for a significant proportion of low-income or poor households. Lastly, although more child care space became available in the 1990s, the supply has not come anywhere close to matching demand. Even the increased funding

allocations for regulated child care have not been able to match the demand or otherwise accommodate needs, especially of those with limited financial resources.

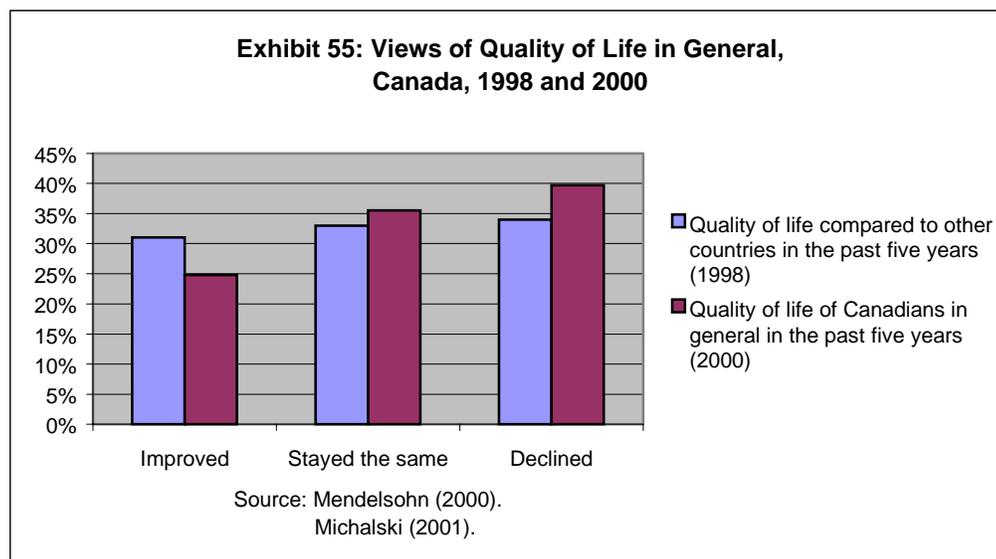
In assessing the community, the single most positive trend involves the declines in both violent and property crime rates. The tendency remains, however, for the majority of Canadians to perceive crime as stable or perhaps getting worse. Although attitudes toward the police have not changed much, the perceptions of the courts and the prison and probation/parole systems have become slightly more negative. As a final dimension, volunteerism has declined within communities as a whole, although donation rates remained the same or even increased slightly.

In summation then, Canada has earned a mixed review in assessing the quality of life during the 1990s. While the majority of Canadians arguably enjoyed an overall better quality of life at the end of 1990s, any number of specific indicators could cast a more negative light on that generalization. To be among the poor or living in a low-income household situation in the 1990s likely meant even greater hardship than in the decades immediately preceding the 1990s. The quality of life for the genders differed substantially in certain areas, sometimes favouring men and other times women. Differences in the quality of life at the regional level can certainly be observed across a variety of indicators, as has been documented throughout this report.

Canadians' Views of Quality of Life

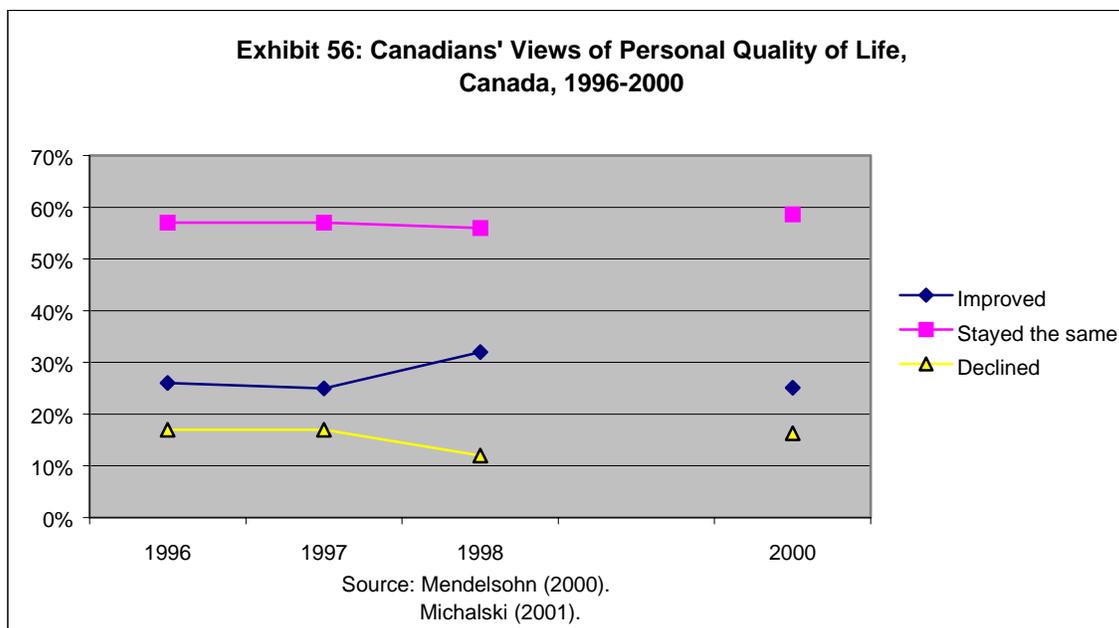
Where does Canada stand at the dawn of the 21st century? The answer to this naturally depends on one's point of reference. For some, the crucial comparison involves Canada's position in the global order. Others are more concerned about how Canada fares today in relation to the quality of life at some time in the past. Furthermore, one can debate the relative importance of each of the indicators as contributors to the quality of life, or whether certain other key indicators should have been included that escaped attention.

Canadians certainly have their own opinions on these matters, which are not always reflected in the tables and charts assembled in this report. For example, a 1998 EKOS poll found that, compared to residents of other countries, Canadians were divided almost evenly in thinking that the quality of life in the past five years had improved, stayed the same or deteriorated (Mendelsohn 2000). The nearly 350 participants in public dialogue sessions sponsored by Canadian Policy Research Networks in October 2000 were somewhat more pessimistic: about 40 percent stated that the quality of life of Canadians in general had declined in the past five years, while only about 25 percent agreed that things had improved (Michalski 2001).



In contrast, in asking people at a more personal level, the evidence from 1996-2000 indicates that Canadians usually felt that their quality of life within the past six months had improved (25 percent) or remained the same (57 percent). Only about one in six Canadians viewed their quality of life as having declined in recent months. Thus, people tend to be more negative in appraising society in general but more optimistic about their own personal situations.

This same discrepancy exists for a whole range of specific dimensions, such as perceptions about the state of the family. For example, a nationwide COMPAS poll from July 2000 sounded the alarm of families in crisis in Canada. Why the concern? The polling results revealed that 38 percent of Canadians agreed strongly with the statement that “family life today is in crisis,” while another 37 percent believed that statement to be “more or less true” (COMPAS 2000). Yet a 1998 Angus Reid poll determined that roughly 85 percent of Canadians were highly satisfied with their *own* relationships with their spouses and their children (Mendelsohn 2000). Similarly, the vast majority of public dialogue participants reported being either “very satisfied” (63 percent) or “somewhat satisfied” (35 percent) with their families (Michalski 2001).



What Next?

The current report card provides a correction to the tendency to overstate the negative. There certainly are trouble spots that require attention, but there has been progress in other areas. The research seems to suggest, however, that the power of personal experience provides the filter through which most people assess the quality of life in Canada, regardless of the evidence adduced.

In the spirit of public dialogue, the report card ideally should stimulate further discussion about the quality of life in Canada. The ability to move beyond our personal preferences and experiences to hear others' voices and to be able to examine the issues at a broader level are important outcomes of the dialogue process. To the extent that the current report contributes to these ends, an important objective has been achieved. But there are other important considerations — other strengths and limitations of the approach here that should be highlighted and cause for further discussion.

On the positive side of the ledger, the report card summarizes quality of life data that reflect the values and preferences of a diverse range of Canadians. The main innovation stems from the process of consulting Canadians first about what matters to their quality of life and receiving their input about what should be monitored in a quality of life reporting system. The information presented in the tables and charts is not new. Most of the indicators can be found in other documents and more detailed studies of specific areas, such as health (Canadian Institute for Health Information 2001), education (Statistics Canada and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada 2000), the environment (Environment Canada 2001), and personal security (Schetagne, Jackson and Harman 2001), to name a few. The report card serves as a complement to, rather than a replacement of, these more detailed reports.

The presentation of summary indicators, both in the most recent years and as trend data over time, provides a baseline against which to chart future progress on the quality of life in Canada. How can one map such a diverse range of indicators to determine overall progress, apart from simply identifying the slope of the trend for each individual indicator? One common approach that analysts have used involves normalizing and ranking the distribution of diverse sets of indicators to provide composite scores (e.g., Anielski et al. 2001; Schetagne, Jackson and Harman 2001; and see GPI Atlantic 2001). One simply establishes a baseline against which to compare each of the indicators. If only one time point exists, then by default that year becomes the baseline or comparison year. If data exist for multiple years, then one can compare the performance in specific years with a standard determined by the best performance in any year in the series.

The question remains, however, about the relative importance of different facets in contributing to quality of life. How does one apply a weight to each of the different indicators, or does one simply treat these as equally important (Anielski et al. 2001)? One approach could be to rank the indicators based on the feedback and reporting of public dialogue participants, or the breadth of support that each theme receives when participants are asked to rank their priorities. For example, if health ranked as the most common theme, cited as a priority by 85 percent of the participants, then that figure could be converted to an absolute standard of 100 and all other indicators would be ranked in importance relative to that standard.

While many of the issues are likely to remain important, there may yet be changes over time in the relative rankings that citizens assign to particular issues as contributors to quality of life. Consequently, the public will need to be consulted on a consistent basis to track whatever shifts in thinking may develop in their perceptions of quality of life. Generating representative samples for public dialogue discussions will be absolutely essential to ensuring the validity of a citizen-driven quality of life monitoring system. The timing of future dialogues could readily coincide with Census years, or even more often, depending on available funding and/or the regularity with which the data are collected for each indicator.

Whatever the directions of future reporting on quality of life, the core indicators should continue to be tracked over time by using the same measures. Without such consistency in tracking, the comparisons become problematic if not entirely invalid (Mendelsohn 2000). Financial constraints always impose limitations on the research process, but these should not be particularly difficult in the present context. On the one hand, most of the data tend to be collected already as standardized measures and therefore do not need to be changed or gathered anew expressly for the purpose of generating the quality of life report card. Some data gaps exist, however, and an investment in future research and measurement will be required to accommodate the full range of indicators that Canadians think matter in assessing quality of life. On the other hand, the trend data do not reveal dramatic annual swings in particular indicators. Consequently, there is no compelling need or reason to generate a new report each year, but rather at most on a biannual or even longer basis.

As a final consideration, the report card has presented the quality of life evidence by assessing trends at the national and provincial levels. Although people certainly live within these broader political boundaries, their lived lives take place much more directly within particular

communities. To that end, the current report card can serve as a template to assess the quality of life at the community level, which may help to inform local policy debates and assist with community planning and development. Some of the data may not be available at the community level; yet other data, such as those monitoring the availability of community programs and services, may be even more relevant and accessible at the local level. Such an initiative logically coincides with or supplements the work of organizations such as GPI Atlantic (2001), which argue that “local communities are urgently looking for ways to assess their well-being accurately, and to measure their progress genuinely.” The quality of life report card approach provides a useful framework that can help communities achieve the objective of assessing well-being or the quality of life at the local level. Such an approach will permit comparisons with other communities, as well as create the opportunity for further dialogue regarding initiatives that have had more or less positive impacts across Canada.

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