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# Vital Signs Prince George: Telling our Story

Background Brief



Prepared by the Community Development Institute  
University of Northern British Columbia  
For the Prince George Community Foundation  
October 2017

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## AVAILABILITY

This report is available online through the Prince George Community Foundation at <http://pgcf.ca/> and <https://www.unbc.ca/community-development-institute>.

### *Project Reports*

- Prince George Vital Signs: Telling our Story.
- Prince George Vital Signs: Telling our Story. Background Brief.

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## OVERVIEW

With this report, we would like to provide a tool for community practitioners and members alike to get a sense of our particular community characteristics. We have included and summarized a selection of data to provide an overview of Prince George's 'vital signs' in the following four indicator areas.

### People and Work

This indicator builds understanding of the socioeconomic fabric of Prince George and how it has changed over time. Population size and age, income, and employment provide a foundation for decision making and point out the strengths and needs of our community.

### Health and Well-Being

Health, both physical and mental, is an important indicator of the quality of life in the community. Information pertaining to health and well-being is especially important to help guide and coordinate services and programming within our community.

### The Gap between Rich and Poor

Income secures access to opportunity, including education, recreation, and healthy nutrition among other things. Awareness of the gap between rich and poor, as well as the composition of the population living in low income situations, can inform service and infrastructure plans and programs.

### Housing

A number of factors, including resource economy cycles and real estate prices in other regions, affect housing in Prince George. A snapshot of our housing shows its strengths as well as discrepancies between existing housing and current and forecasted needs. This kind of information can be used to guide future development.

## Highlights

Some of the highlights in our findings tell the story of a strong and diverse community with unique opportunities and attractions that might, at times, be undervalued. Prince George is a growing community with a diverse and aging population, high incomes, strong employment, and a diverse economy. Vulnerability to economic events on a larger scale, child poverty, and a gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens clearly present challenges to our community; however, the fact that our economy has demonstrated the ability to recover from crises, that we still have a younger population than many other regions, and that socioeconomic outcomes for our Indigenous population are at least comparable to other regions, and are improving, highlights opportunities in our challenges.

In terms of health and well-being, our community ranks high in terms of life satisfaction, sense of belonging, active lifestyle, and health services. Nonetheless, there are challenges related to healthy habits, and some population groups are more vulnerable than others. These findings can help steer future efforts towards strengthening population health in sustainable ways.

Low income data suggests that the population of Prince George experiences similar or slightly less severe financial stress than people in other regions. At the same time, higher rates for children and the apparent vulnerability of lone parent families call for attention. Measures to alleviate income stresses have to include immediate relief but should also go beyond that in addressing root causes linked to education and health.

The housing continuum in Prince George includes a wide range of housing and services. Findings in this report suggest that the housing stock, while in good condition, is dominated by larger detached homes. This does not respond to the housing needs of our community with predominantly smaller households of one and two people. Given the growing seniors population, efforts to increase accessible housing and designated seniors housing are a step in the right direction.

This report aims to facilitate access to relevant data and information for community members and practitioners. We also invite the community to start discussions and see Prince George's opportunities in a new light.

## INTRODUCTION

It is important for citizens, organizations, practitioners, service providers, and government to have current and easily accessible information about Prince George and its people. While economic and community development in the North should be seen as a network of connections on regional, provincial, national, and international levels, some of Prince George's local challenges and opportunities distinguish us from other communities in the North and from larger centres in the Lower Mainland. As part of northern British Columbia's resource-dependent rural and small town region, we are closely connected to the small and remote northern communities surrounding us. We share the climate, long distance to larger metropolitan areas, and lower population density. Yet, we are a service centre for many of those communities, which means some of our challenges and opportunities differ from those of our neighbours. As this report will outline, the combination of an increasingly diverse economy, a comparatively young labour force, a broad spectrum of amenities, and an attractive natural setting translate to a high quality of life at affordable prices. Prince George prides itself on offering city amenities with a small town personality. However, the population is constantly evolving. Changes in age structure and household composition, as well as ethnic makeup and income patterns call for attention. It is important to take inventory of physical and service infrastructures and ensure that changing needs are met and opportunities are realized.

With this report, we would like to provide a tool for community practitioners and members alike to get a sense of our particular community characteristics. A lot of local, regional, provincial, and national data is available to the public. However, it can be time consuming and overwhelming to find and sort through relevant data pertaining to any given topic and to extract the information one is looking for. That is where this report aims to help. It presents and summarizes a selection of data to provide an overview of Prince George's 'vital signs' in four indicator areas. The report can be used to simply get a manageable selection of information or as an access point to more comprehensive data sets.

We have identified four indicator areas to include in this report. The first is titled "People and Work". It describes the socioeconomic fabric of the community and how it has changed over time. Population size and age, income, and employment provide a foundation for decision making and point out the needs and strengths of our community's development. "Health and Well-Being" is the next area of interest. It is an important part of the quality of life in the community and can serve as an indicator of opportunities for improvement in health services and lifestyle programming. It also highlights positive attributes that add to Prince George's attractiveness. Information pertaining to health and well-being is especially important to help strategically guide and coordinate efforts within the community. Closely linked to this through factors such as program accessibility and



affordability is the “Gap between Rich and Poor”. Income secures access to programming and healthy nutrition among other things; consequently, low income can mean limited access to opportunity. The gap between rich and poor as well as the composition of the population living in low income situations further informs service and infrastructure plans and programs. This brings us to the last topic, “Housing”. A lot of outside factors affect the housing market and housing stock in Prince George. Housing prices in Vancouver, for example, influence prices in the North as they lead to an orientation towards our more affordable market. Resource economy cycles have a fluctuating effect on vacancy rates in most northern communities, and the economy, ranging from local to global developments, drives building activity. A snapshot of Prince George’s housing situation shows its strengths as well as discrepancies between the existing housing stock and recent development on the one hand and current and forecasted needs on the other. This kind of information can be used to guide future development.

## Methodology

The methodology applied in this report includes data searches in existing databases such as Statistics Canada’s Census program. Where available, Prince George data refers to the Prince George Census Agglomeration (CA). The CA covers an area of 17,686km<sup>2</sup> and includes areas that access services in Prince George. North of Prince George along Highway 97, the CA includes Salmon Valley; to the East along Highway 16, it includes Penny; south of Prince George along Highway 97, the CA ends north of Sweder Road but extends further south west of the highway; finally, to the West along Highway 16, it includes Bednesti Lake and Isle Pierre.<sup>1</sup> These areas are relevant to Vital Signs as the report aims to provide data for service providers. In order to fill in information where statistical data are not complete, other sources include reports by local and regional organizations, as well as personal conversations with some representatives of community organizations. A full list of sources is included at the end of the report and can be used as a starting point for further research.

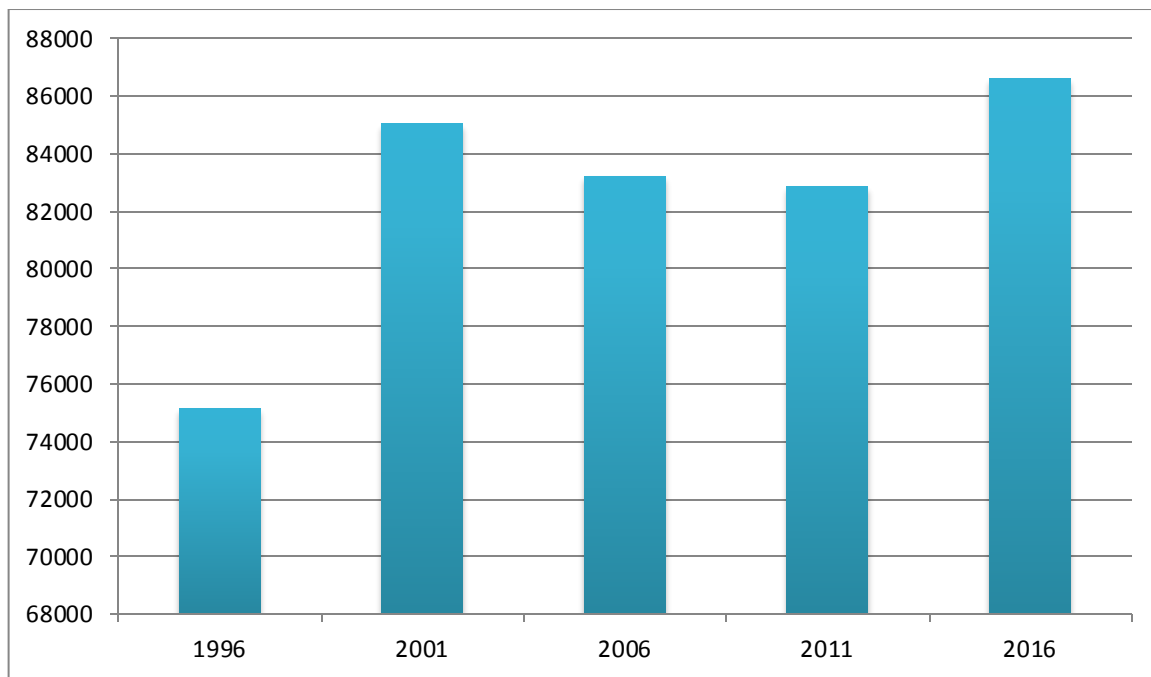
## PEOPLE AND WORK

In this section, we will paint a picture of the population of Prince George and the socioeconomic situation our population is facing. This will include population size and growth over time, as well as age structure. Prince George's ethnic makeup is of interest as it distinguishes us from other regions. The economic aspect is described through income, employment, and some information on the industry sectors providing employment<sup>2</sup>.

### Population Growth

Prince George's total population has grown from 75,150 in 1996 to 86,622 in 2016. It should be noted that this growth has not been a steady increase. The years between 1996 and 2001 saw a 13% increase that was followed by a decade of declining population numbers. Only in the last five years has this decline turned into a slow recovery and growth over the 2001 population numbers.

**Figure 1.1 Total Population Prince George Census Agglomeration**



Source: Statistics Canada. 1996-2016. Census Program.

During the decrease in the first ten years of the new millennium, Prince George significantly lagged behind the province and the nation in population growth. However, the growth in recent years is

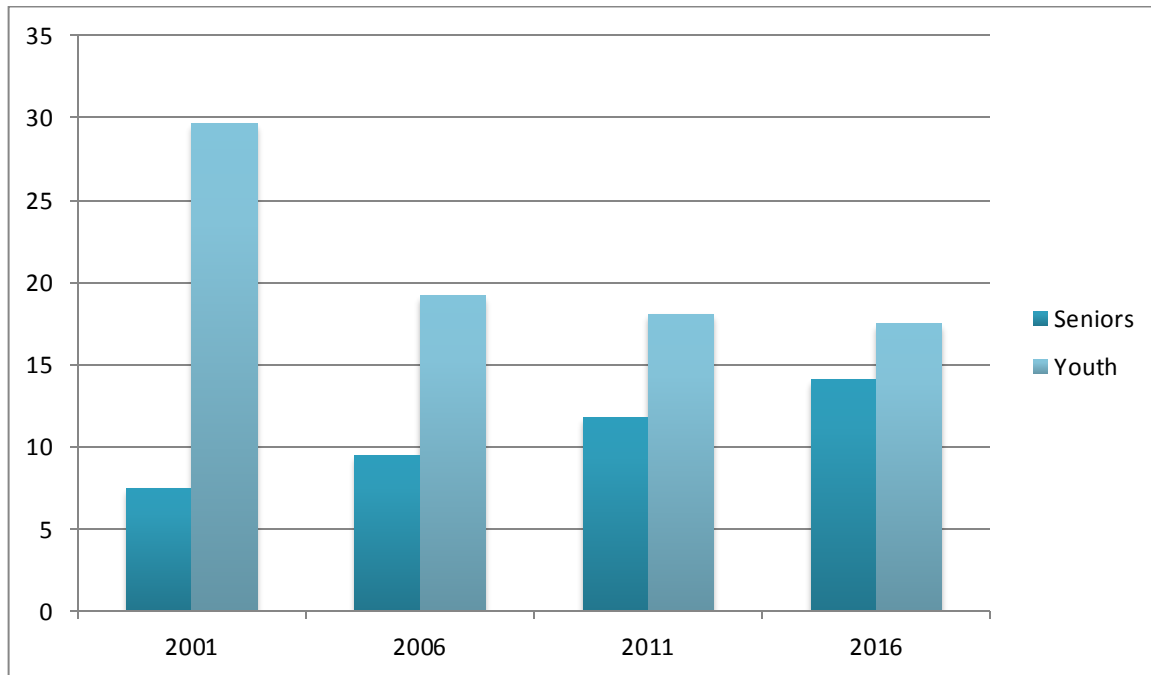
only slightly below provincial and federal rates; the Prince George population increased by 4.5% between 2006 and 2016, while the provincial population grew by 5.6%, and the national growth rate was 5.0%. The reasons for those developments can be of local or global nature. The beginning of the new millennium, for example, posed a number of global challenges including the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the bankruptcy of the Enron Corporation. During those times, Prince George appears to have been more vulnerable than British Columbia and Canada. The lesson to be drawn from the fluctuations is that Prince George is not immune to the effects of global forces and needs to invest in resiliency.

## Population Age

Looking at population age over the last one and a half decades, Prince George used to have a significantly younger population than the province and the country overall. In 2001, almost 1 in 3 people in Prince George were under 14 years of age. By 2016, our population age structure looks much more like that of British Columbia and Canada with less than 1 in 5 being under 14 compared to 1 in 6 for Canada and close to 1 in 7 for British Columbia. At the same time, the number of Prince George seniors has increased much faster than in other regions. With 1 in 6 people being a senior aged 65 or older in Prince George in 2016, we still have a smaller senior population than British Columbia and Canada. However, a 6% growth rate in our senior population since 2001 indicates the increasing significance of that age group.

This brings unique opportunities and challenges. Seniors are likely to require more medical services, accessible housing, and various levels of care. On the other hand, seniors tend to stay healthier longer nowadays and have the potential to diversify the consumer base and strengthen a community's volunteer force, thereby adding quality and quantity to programs and services. From an economic perspective, it is important to keep in mind the opportunities for businesses to cater to this growing population group and to be aware of their evolving interests and spending habits.

**Figure 1.2 Population Age: Seniors and Youth in Prince George**



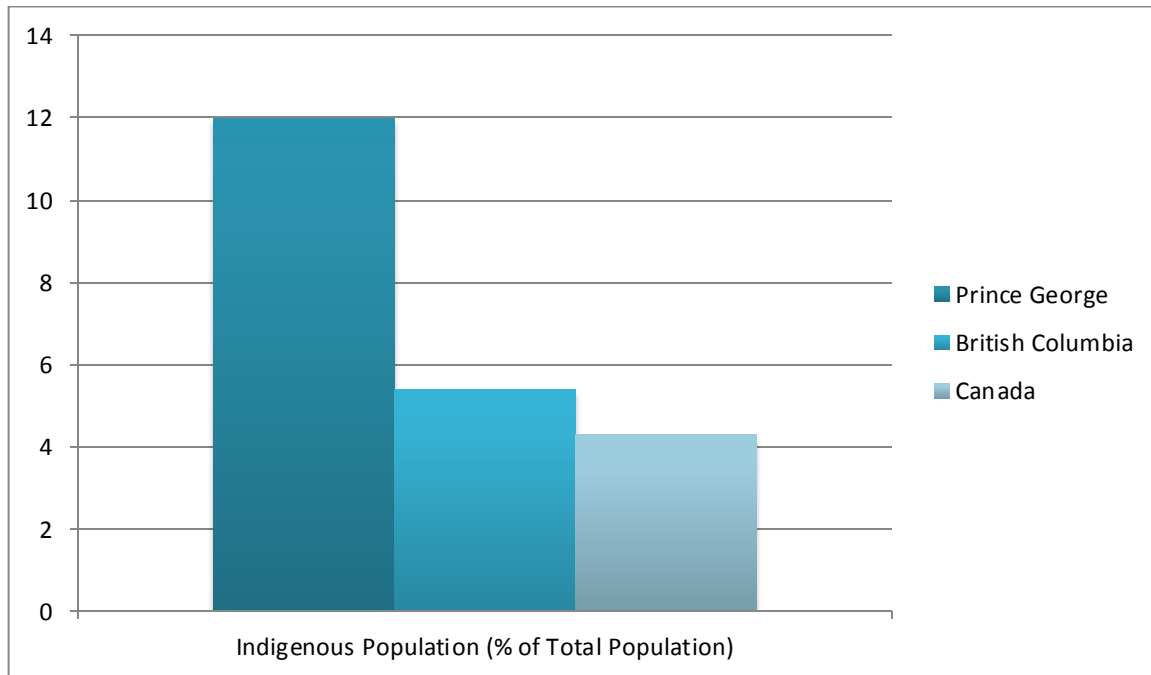
Source: Statistics Canada. 2001-2016. Census Program.

## Indigenous Population

It should be noted that the Indigenous population is one of the youngest population groups with a median age of 26 years in 2006 compared a non-Indigenous median age of 39 years. Prince George has a comparatively large Indigenous population with 12% identifying as Indigenous in 2011 compared to 5.4% in British Columbia and 4.3% in Canada.

Data comparison shows that Prince George’s Indigenous population has less favourable outcomes in education, income, and health than the non-Indigenous population. This definitely calls for attention and resources in order to improve the situation.

**Figure 1.3 Indigenous Population in 2011**



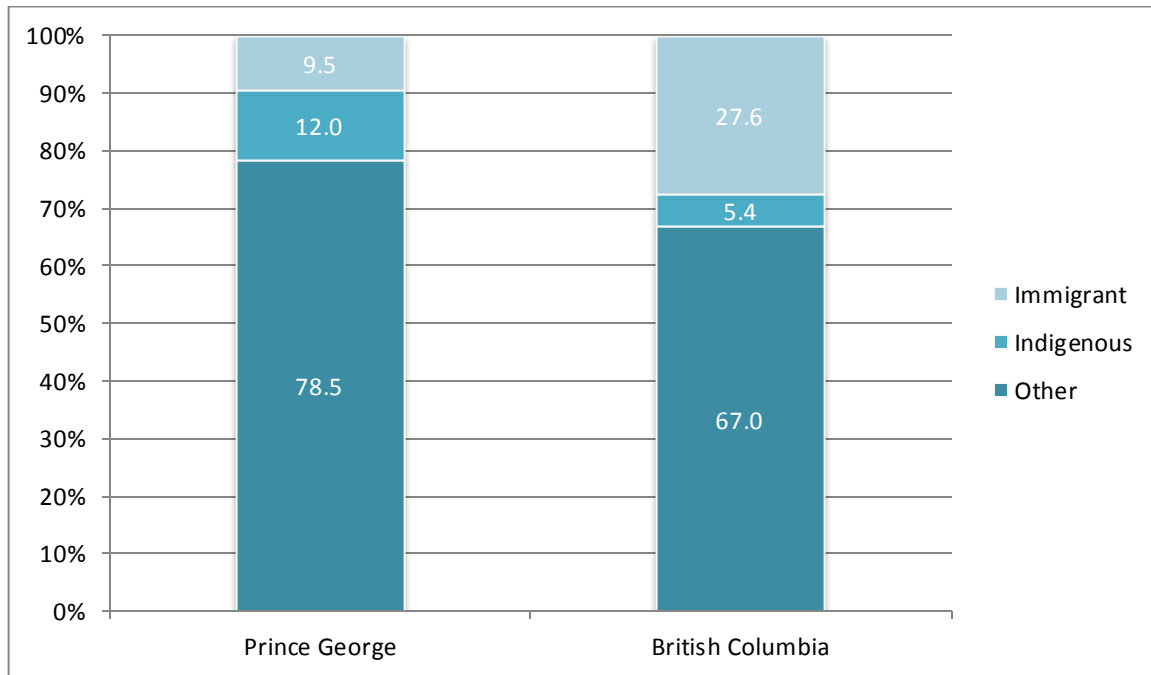
Source: Statistics Canada. 2011. National Household Survey: Community Profiles.

There is great opportunity in being home to a young population group of a significant size. Youth have the potential to strengthen Prince George’s workforce in the near future. In order to tap into this potential young workforce, it is important to invest in Indigenous education especially and make sure it meets the needs of the Indigenous community. It might be helpful to look to other cities like Kamloops and Vancouver, which have better Indigenous education outcomes, as well as small communities with well-performing education systems to find out if some of their approaches hold lessons for Prince George.

## Immigrants

Another aspect of the community’s ethnic fabric is immigration. In 2011, 9.5% of Prince George’s population were immigrants. Almost half of those emigrated from Europe and just under one-third were of Asian descent. For British Columbia on the other hand, 27.6% of the total population were immigrants, and well over half of those have emigrated from Asia, especially China and India. As migration numbers will demonstrate later in this report, Prince George is seeing few of the immigrants seeking a new home in our province.

**Figure 1.4 Ethnic Population Composition in 2011: Prince George (CA) vs. British Columbia**

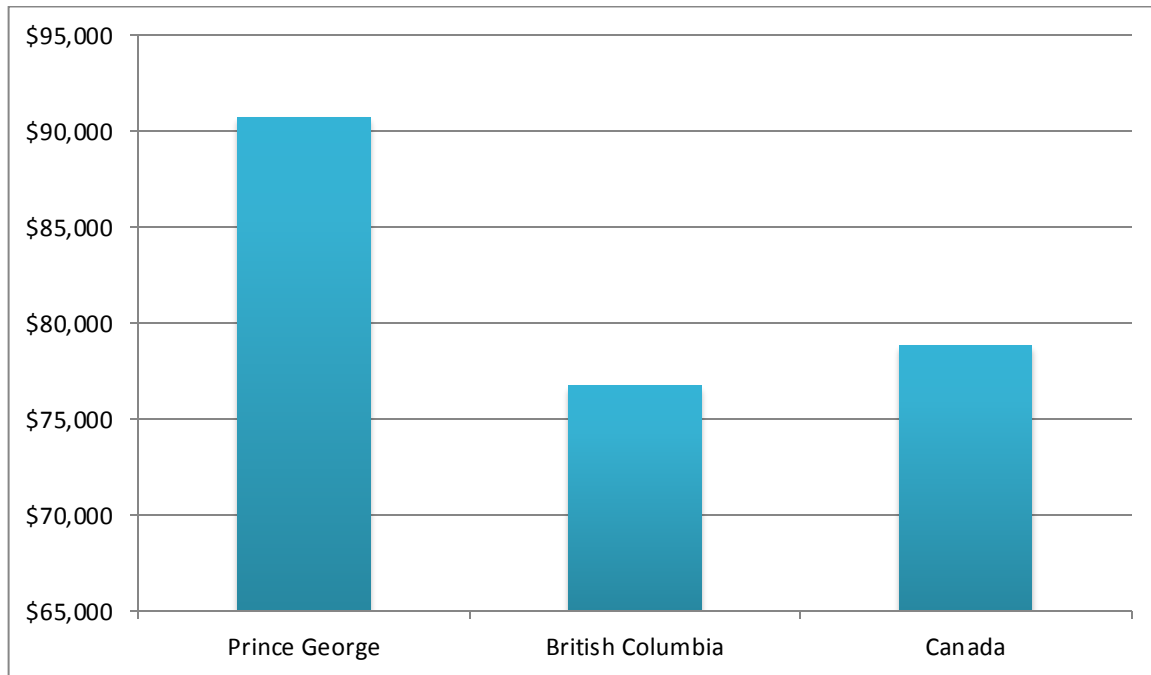


Source: Statistics Canada. 2011. National Household Survey.

## Income

The median family income for Prince George has not only been above that for British Columbia and Canada but is also growing at a faster rate and, in 2014, is at \$90,780. Median family income means half of all families earn above and half below that amount. While this number does not reflect average income or how many families are facing low income situations in our community, it does show that Prince George is home to some very high earners.

**Figure 1.5 Median Family Income in 2014 in Canadian Dollars**

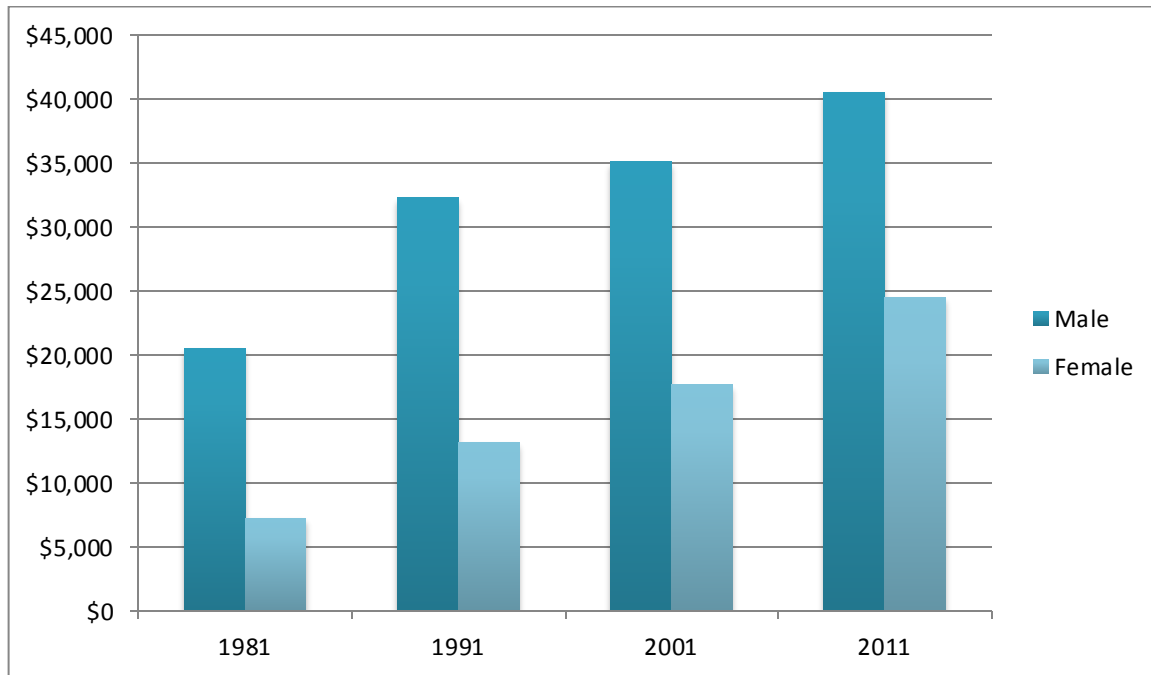


Source: Statistics Canada. Table 111-0009. Characteristics of families, summary census family income table, annual.

As mentioned before, Indigenous median income tends to be lower. However, available data suggests a decreasing gap. Indigenous individual median earnings in 2000 were at roughly 75% of non-Indigenous earnings. By 2005, they were at 80%<sup>3</sup>.

A comparison of male and female median income from 1981 to 2011 shows that women's median income has been significantly lower than men's. A generally similar median income increase in dollar amounts for men and women over the years means that female median income has gone from being 36% of male median income in 1981 to 61% in 2011.

**Figure 1.6 Male and Female Median Income in Prince George in Canadian Dollars**



Source: Statistics Canada. 1981-2001. Census Program.

Statistics Canada. 2011. National Household Survey.

The gender gap in median income should not be confused with average earnings but does indicate that women are under-represented in high paying positions. Despite what the numbers are telling us about women in high paying positions, it should not go unnoticed that many influential organizations located in Prince George and the region feature women in senior positions. This is also reflected in the fact that communities in northern British Columbia are more likely to have female mayors than those in the South. The almost equal representation of women and men in publications like the Prince George Chamber of Commerce's *Top 40 Under 40* publication further highlights the significant role women play in our local economy<sup>4</sup>. This publication also emphasizes the active and successful participation of young business people in the economy.

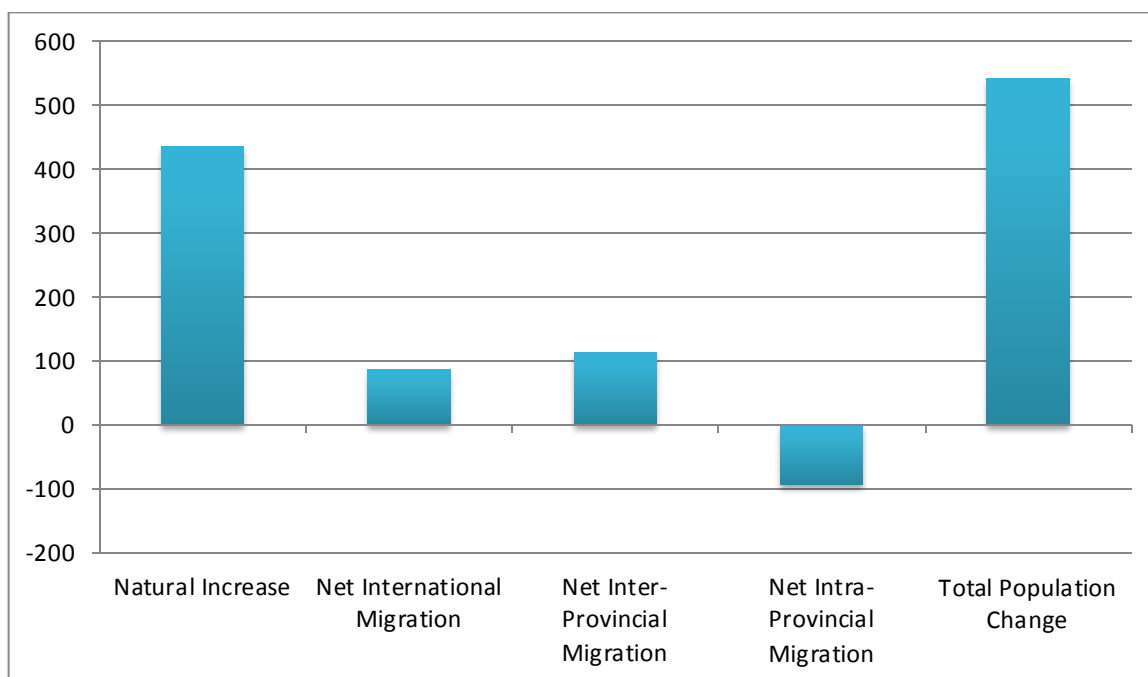
## Migration

We get a more detailed insight into population growth by looking at migration numbers. Net migration includes natural growth through births and deaths, growth through immigrants settling in our area versus emigrants leaving our area, growth through migration to and from other provinces, and migration within British Columbia. While not available for Prince George, the numbers for Fraser-Fort George indicate that the main growth in this region continues to be from natural



increase, i.e. more births than deaths. While immigrants and people from other provinces also contribute to our growth, the region has been and is still losing people to other areas of British Columbia. In comparison, British Columbia and Canada draw the majority of their growth from international migration. In other words, British Columbia is seeing a considerable number of immigrants each year, but they do not settle in our region.

**Figure 1.7 Net Migration in Fraser-Fort George in 2014-2015**



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 051-0057. Components of population growth by census metropolitan area, sex and age group for the period from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015.

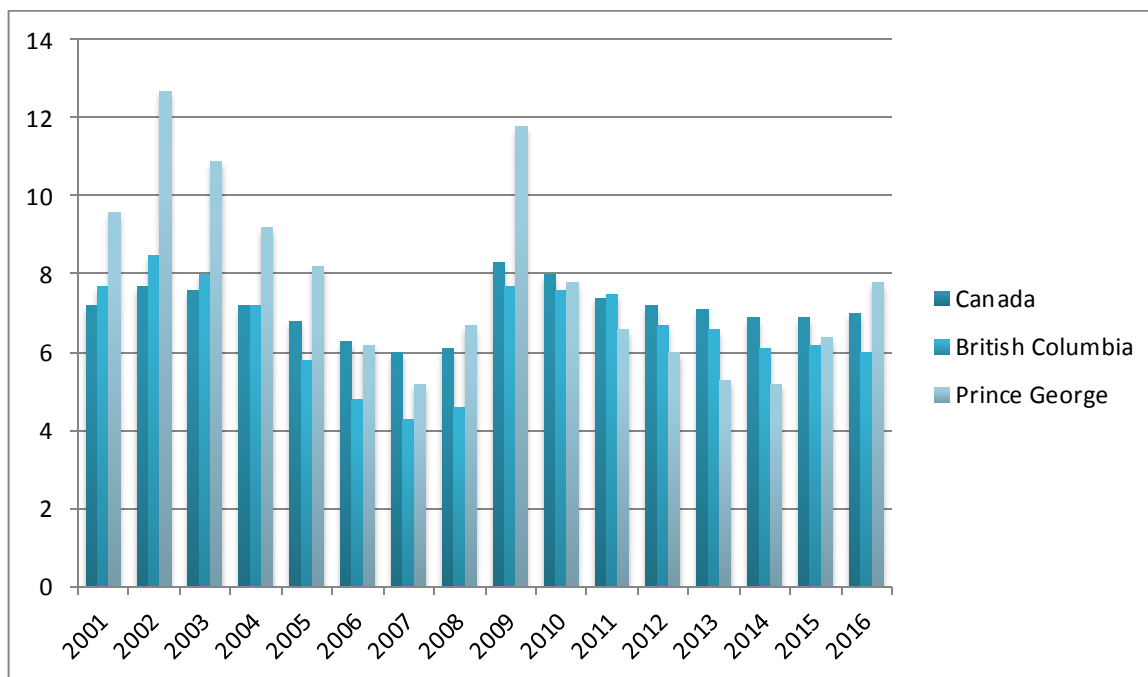
Our migration findings suggest a number of strategic starting points for maintaining or strengthening growth in Prince George. One opportunity is to focus on the current main growth factor, natural growth. While still the main growth factor, natural growth has been on the decline in our region, which confirms the increased population aging mentioned above. This leads to the conclusion that we need to pay attention to relevant support services and programs to maintain a family-friendly region that encourages people to raise their children here. The other main opportunity for growth lies in attraction and retention strategies. Such strategies explore how, where, and to whom Prince George wants to advertise its attributes and attractions. For example, online initiatives such as *Move It Up Prince George* market our affordable living, natural setting, and family friendly environment to attract people from other regions in British Columbia. Creating awareness of our attributes and opportunities and changing the image other regions may have of Prince George could help with attraction and retention within British Columbia and strengthen that

weaker aspect of the area’s growth. Considering that we are not attracting our share of immigrants, a look at how immigrant needs and aspirations and Prince George’s opportunities and services line up might help direct immigrant attention to the North.

## Employment and Labour Market

Prince George’s unemployment rate in 2016 was at 7.8%. Its fluctuations over time have been similar to provincial and national rates, reflecting global economic developments over the past one and a half decades.

**Figure 1.8 Unemployment Rate**



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 282-0110. Labour force survey estimates, by census metropolitan area based on 2006 census boundaries, sex and age group, annual.

As mentioned before, Prince George’s population growth over time is strongly influenced by global economic events. This is likely directly dependent on the unemployment rate. Figure 1.8 shows that the unemployment rate in Prince George displays stronger reactions to larger economic circumstances than those of British Columbia and Canada, supporting the conclusion of the higher vulnerability of our local economy. For most of the time, however, unemployment has remained close to provincial and national rates between 5 and 10% with the exception of 2002/3 and 2009. Youth unemployment tends to be higher across the country and was at 11.3% in Prince George in 2016. This suggests that there is unrealized potential in the youth workforce. In order to keep youth

in the community and integrate them into the workforce, it is important to look at what youth expect of their community, how affordability affects them, and why they appear to have a harder time finding employment. Indigenous unemployment also tends to be considerably higher. In 2006, for example, Indigenous unemployment of 13.7% compared to non-Indigenous unemployment at 6.0%.

Statistical numbers for employment by industry provide some indicators for diversification that has happened over time as well as sectors that might benefit from additional efforts and attention<sup>5</sup>. In the 1980s and 90s, manufacturing was one of the main employers for the working population in Prince George, providing work for up to 20% of employees. In the new millennium, the significance of manufacturing as an employer has decreased notably to making up well below 10% of all employment. Meanwhile, sales and services employ 25% of employees today in the Cariboo Economic Region. This underlines the role of Prince George as a service centre in the North. The other main industry sector in the Cariboo is that of trades, transportation, and equipment operation, which also employs close to 25% of workers. Business, finance, and administration are another strong sector putting well over 10% of the labour force to work.

Two of the less represented sectors, which directly impact quality of life, include health and arts, culture, recreation, and sports. The health sector in Prince George and the region has some major accomplishments over the past few years to show. Treatment centres and service facilities, especially a university hospital and a cancer centre, contribute to broadening local employment opportunities in the health sector and constitute an increase in local quality of life with added locally available services.

Arts, culture, recreation, and sports are an example of where statistical numbers don't capture the full picture. While this sector may not be a significant employer, there is still a rich breadth of programming for Prince George citizens to enjoy and become involved in. The reality of the sector is that it depends in large parts on volunteerism. Lived experience, in adult or children's sports programs for example, shows that volunteers at many facilities and within many different organizations donate their time to offer programs and services. After school and summer programs for children and youth in particular are often driven by parents and community leaders. This information is relevant and closely linked to healthy lifestyle considerations. While strong volunteerism adds depth and opportunity to the community, the inherent unpredictability of volunteerism means a greater risk of program loss<sup>6</sup>.

When it comes to fine arts, performing arts, and the music scene in Prince George, individuals immersed in it confirm that the majority of artists either pursue many part time engagements to make a living or have a full-time job in a different sector<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, the local arts and music scenes are growing, and opportunities to make a living are increasing. Many bars and restaurants as

well as new art spaces provide increasing opportunity for local musicians and performing artists to showcase their talent. They also attract acts from other regions since payment in smaller towns, including Prince George, tends to be higher than in bigger centres. The Two Rivers Art Gallery provides another platform for artists and art-related programming. This sector is closely linked to quality of life and attractiveness through entertainment and variety within the community. Chances for strengthening this aspect of the community could include facilitating grant processes and further investing in venues, for example to make existing infrastructure more suitable for musical performances or to allow more collaboration between the different arts. It has also been noted that, while a lot of kids programs are being offered through the art gallery, music schools, and individuals, there is still a need to facilitate young people's access to the scene and involve them more actively.

For those engaged in economic and community development, the arts and culture sector can play a key role in building economic diversification and community resilience. We are seeing in our society a new, much broader definition of arts and culture evolve. Concepts such as 'creative economy' and 'creative industries' are emerging and include design, information technology, and media, in addition to the more familiar arts and culture components such as museums, galleries, libraries, music, and performing and visual arts. The arts and culture sector not only provides abundant opportunities for locally-based economic growth and diversification; it also builds social relations and networks, volunteerism, and pride in the community. Communities that include creativity, arts, and culture as part of their vision and plans for the future enhance both quality of life and quality of place.

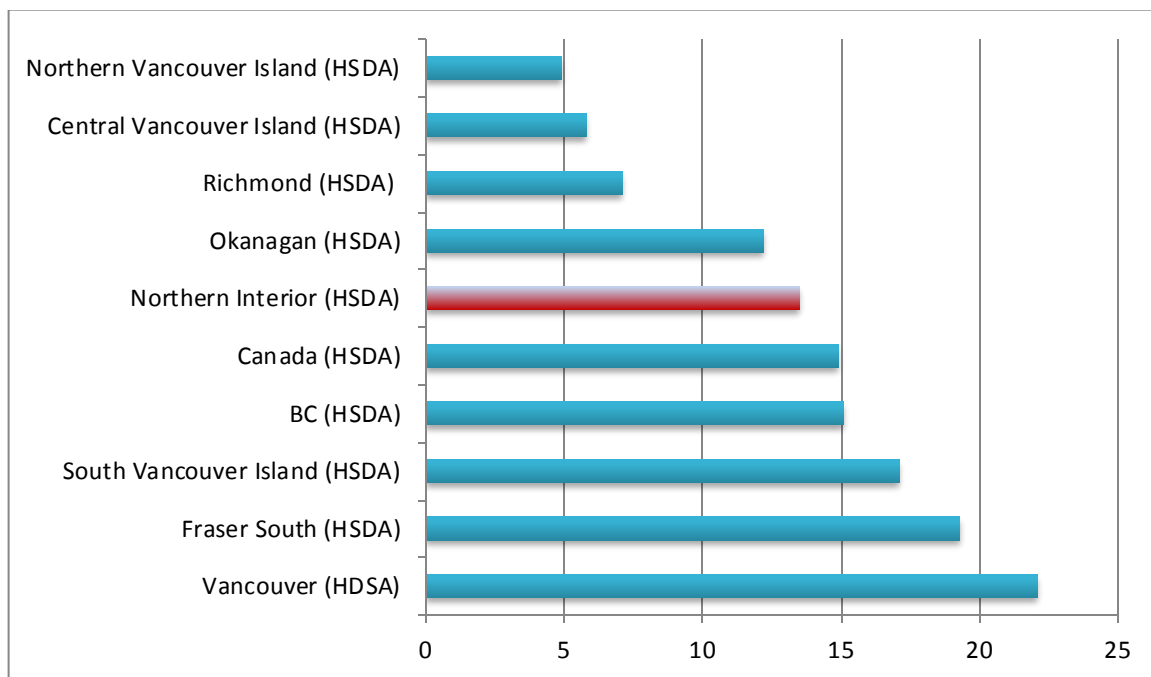
# HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Information in this section comprises three different aspects of health and well-being. These include healthy lifestyle and habits; diagnosed and perceived illness and wellness; and programs, services, and local attributes pertaining to health and well-being<sup>8</sup>. Information is provided for the Northern Interior Health Service Delivery Area since it was not available for Prince George alone.

## Access to a Physician

In 2014, 13.5% of the population aged 12 and over reported not having a regular medical doctor. While some places are hit harder by it than others, the percentage of people without a regular medical doctor in the Northern Interior is still below provincial and national rates.

**Figure 2.1 Percentage of the Population without a Regular Doctor in 2014**



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 105-0501. Health indicator profile, annual estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2013 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional, CANSIM.

As presented in the section on employment industries and the health sector, Prince George has gained numerous medical services, including an additional walk-in clinic, which helps alleviate stresses caused by a shortage of family physicians accepting new patients.

## Healthy Habits

Adult obesity is on the rise. In 2014, 1 in 4 adults were obese in our health service delivery area, and our rate has been consistently well above that of the province. The data collected since 2003 shows fluctuations with even higher rates in some years, but the overall trend is an increase in obesity.

While the exact definition of obesity, and its causes, might differ at the individual level, these numbers can still be considered a warning sign that efforts are needed in the area of healthy living. Besides medical conditions, the main reasons for obesity are a lack of appropriate physical activity and unhealthy eating habits. Education and life skills programs are one way to influence those areas of life. Since much of it is a matter of habit and knowledge, initiatives should be aimed especially at children. Northern Health has published several recent reports concerning child health and outlines more detailed data and strategies<sup>9</sup>. Questions of interest include what types of programs should be developed, how are they funded, and maybe most importantly how to maximize program accessibility and make sure that efforts reach every child in the community.

The 2014 smoking rate of 22% of the population aged 12 and over shows a moderate decrease over the past decade but is still much higher than the province or the country with 14.3% and 18.1% respectively. This indicates that smoking is another aspect of healthy living that calls for attention and action.

Diabetes rates have ranged between 4% and 9% over the past decade and have generally been similar to provincial and national rates. In 2014, 6.5% of the population in the Northern Interior Health Service Delivery Area were diagnosed with a type of diabetes.

The percentage of people who spend their free time engaged in physical activities has fluctuated since 2003 but has seen an overall increase. More than 2 in 3 people aged 12 and over report being physically active in 2014. These numbers are well above those for BC and Canada, which may be linked to the wide range of outdoor recreation and sports opportunities that are available to by residents in the region. While this is a very positive finding, it is important to place continued importance on programs, facilities, and natural features and to make sure that they are maintained and expanded to further contribute to healthy living and making the region attractive.

While being relatively active, more than half of the population does not eat the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. Possible reasons for this include lack of education about what constitutes a healthy diet, as well as affordability and poor eating habits. Resources such as the Nutritious Food Basket or Food Costing BC help understand how the cost of food can influence a healthy diet<sup>10</sup>. Introduced in 1974, the Nutritious Food Basket is a tool to determine the monthly cost of nutritious food by region. This, in turn, can be used to calculate food security for families and individuals. “The meaning of food insecurity ranges from worrying about running out of food (marginal food insecurity), to not being able to afford healthy food (moderate food insecurity), to missing meals or going hungry (severe food insecurity).”<sup>11</sup> The average monthly cost of the nutritious food basket for a family of four in the Northern Health Region has gone up from \$939 in 2013 to \$1032 in 2015, and we are now the most expensive region in the province.

As mentioned above, programs and efforts should be primarily directed at children to make sure that they have access to a healthy diet and to educate them and help them develop healthy habits for life. The findings on children in low income discussed further down lends added urgency to improving access to healthy living programs and healthy foods. Affordable options, possibly subsidized, are of utmost importance. Community efforts might also help direct attention to healthy living. For example, a Healthy Children’s Menu Challenge for local restaurants could be designed to not only provide affordable nutritious meals to children, it could also be used as a vehicle to educate families about healthy eating and possibly gather feedback from them about the challenges they face when it comes to providing healthy meals to their children.

## Mental Health

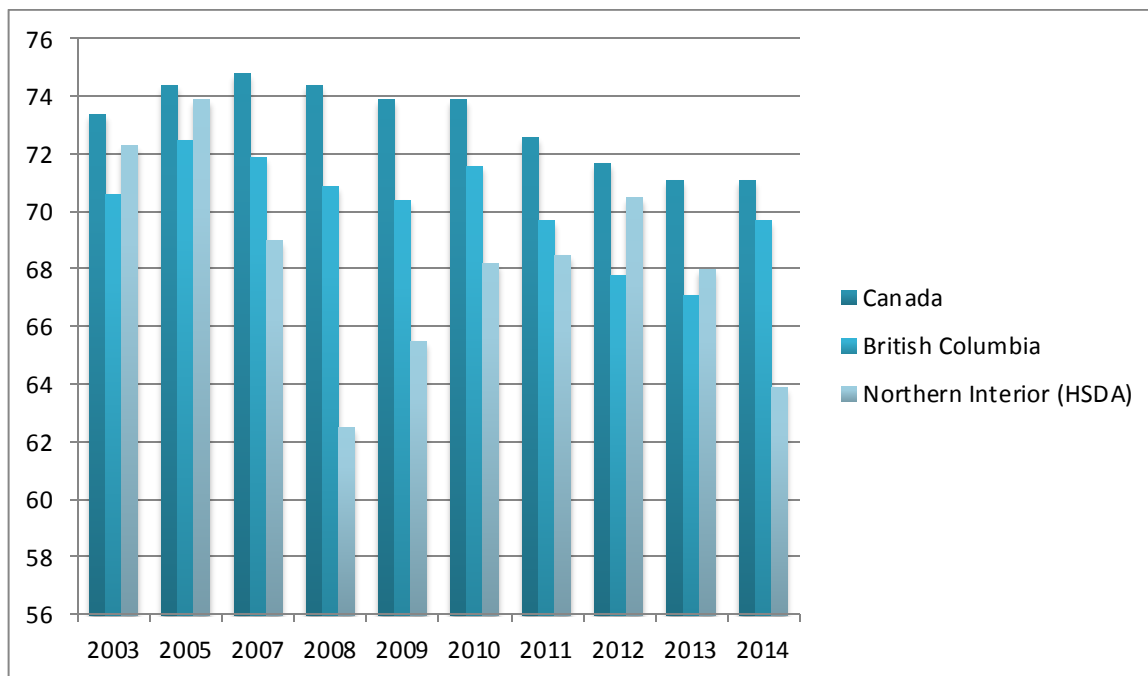
According to the Institutes of Health Research, mental health affects every aspect of life, especially “productive activities, fulfilling relationships and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity”<sup>12</sup>. 1 in 5 Canadians will directly experience mental illness, and nearly everyone is affected through close friends or family members. Indigenous people are statistically more vulnerable when it comes to mental illness and in particular suicidal thoughts<sup>13</sup>.

Self-rated mental health in our region has seen stronger fluctuations since 2003 than British Columbia and Canada. In the early 2000s, well above 70% of people aged 12 and over reported good mental health. After 2009, that rate hovered between 64% and 71%, and by 2014, around 64% felt they were in good mental health.

While specific Indigenous health data pertaining to our region was not available for this report, only 60% of the entire Canadian off-reserve First Nation population reported excellent or good mental health in 2012<sup>14</sup>. It can be assumed that special attention to the Indigenous population is called for

in regards to preventing and treating mental illness in Prince George and the Northern Interior Health Service Delivery Area.

**Figure 2.2 Percentage of the Population (12+) Reporting Very Good or Excellent Mental Health**

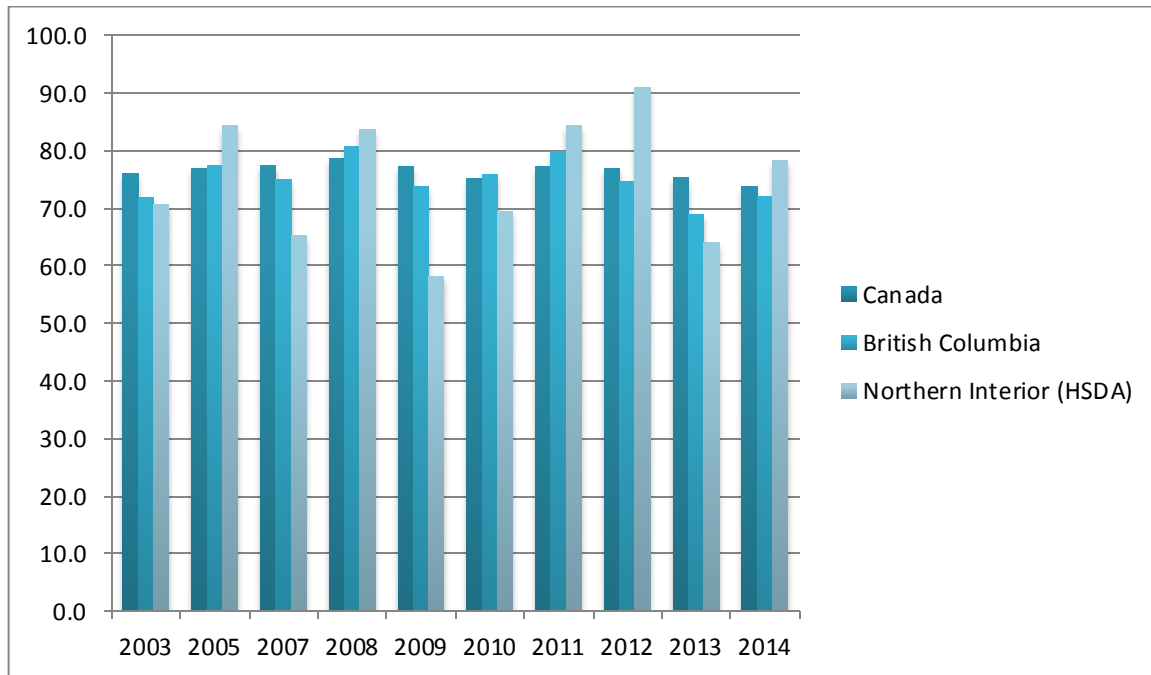


Source: Statistics Canada. Table 105-0501. Health indicator profile, annual estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2013 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional, CANSIM.

Fluctuations in reported mental health appear to run somewhat parallel to economic developments; for example, at the time of the global economic downturn of 2008/9, perceived mental health in our region reached a low. It may be noteworthy that self-rated mental health among youth ages 12 to 19 is better than for the population as a whole, but it shows bigger fluctuations.



**Figure 2.3 Percentage of Youth (12-19) Reporting Very Good or Excellent Mental Health**

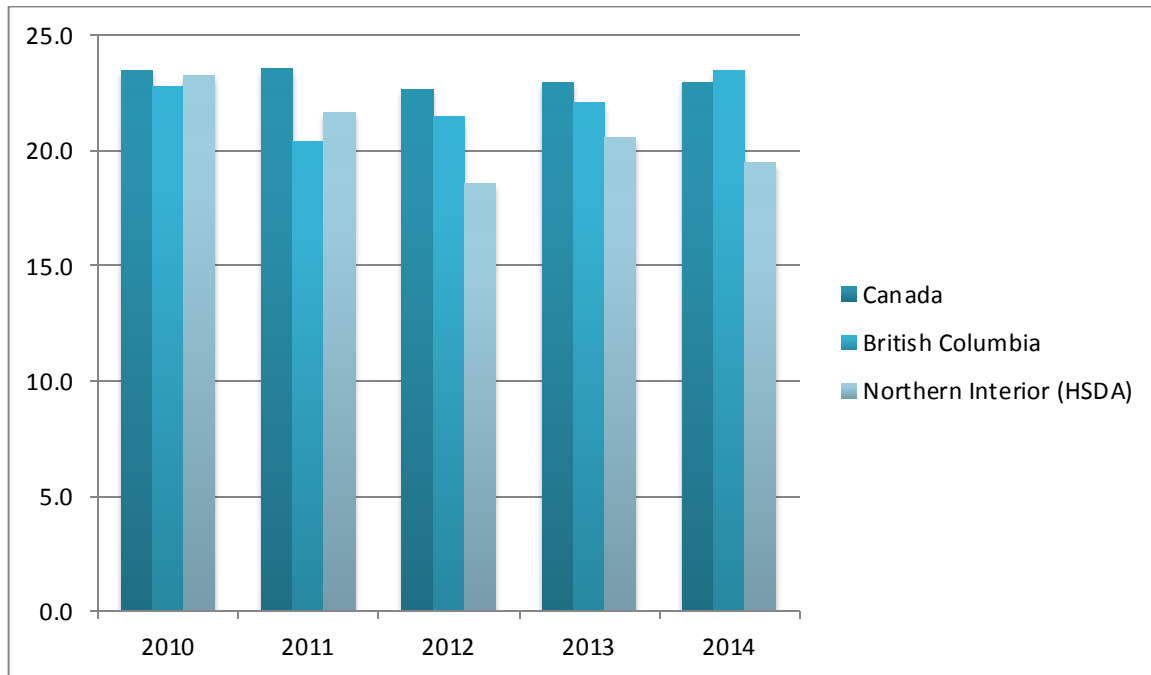


Source: Statistics Canada. Table 105-0501. Health indicator profile, annual estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2013 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional, CANSIM.

## Quality of Life

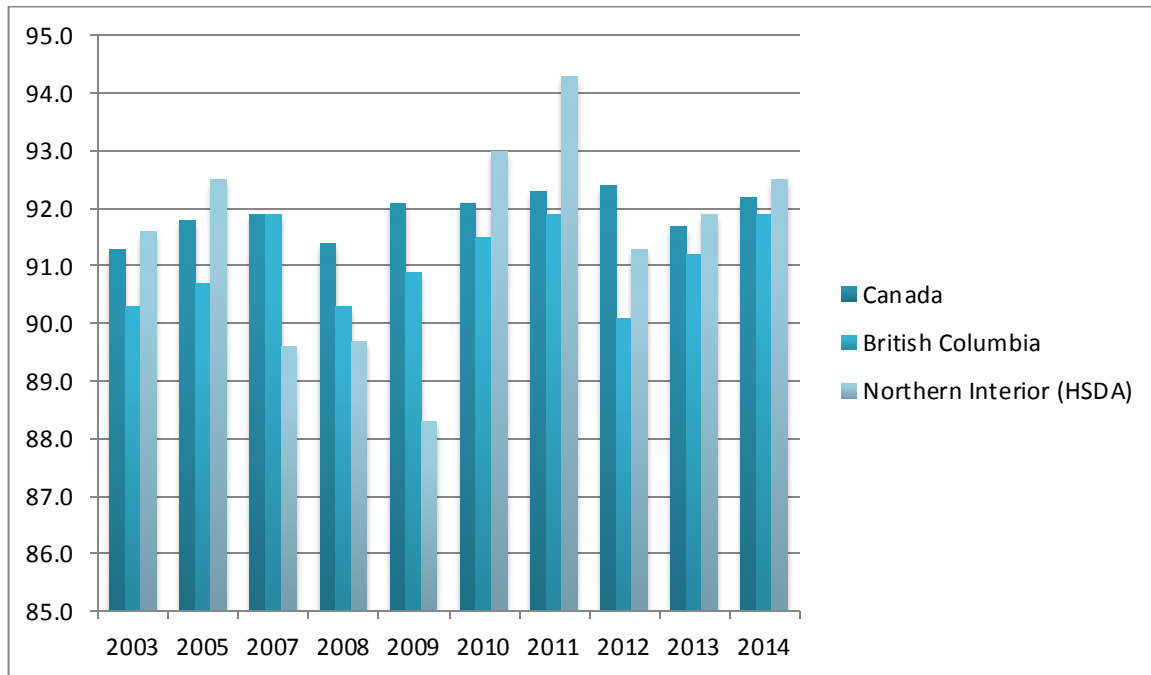
Many residents would describe Prince George as a service centre with a lot of the amenities found in metropolitan areas while still maintaining the ‘small town feeling’ of personal interaction, social networking, and nature at one’s doorstep. This unique combination likely contributes to the overall quality of life as expressed in reported life stress and life satisfaction. Perceived life stress for residents of the Northern Interior Health Services Delivery Area is generally below that of the province and the country, and 9 out of 10 people are satisfied with their lives. As Figure 2.5 shows, life satisfaction has been consistently above that in British Columbia and Canada since 2010.

Figure 2.4 Percentage of the Population (15+) Reporting Quite a Lot of Life Stress



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 105-0501. Health indicator profile, annual estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2013 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional, CANSIM.

**Figure 2.5 Percentage of the Population (12+) Satisfied or Very Satisfied with their Lives**



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 105-0501. Health indicator profile, annual estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2013 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional, CANSIM.

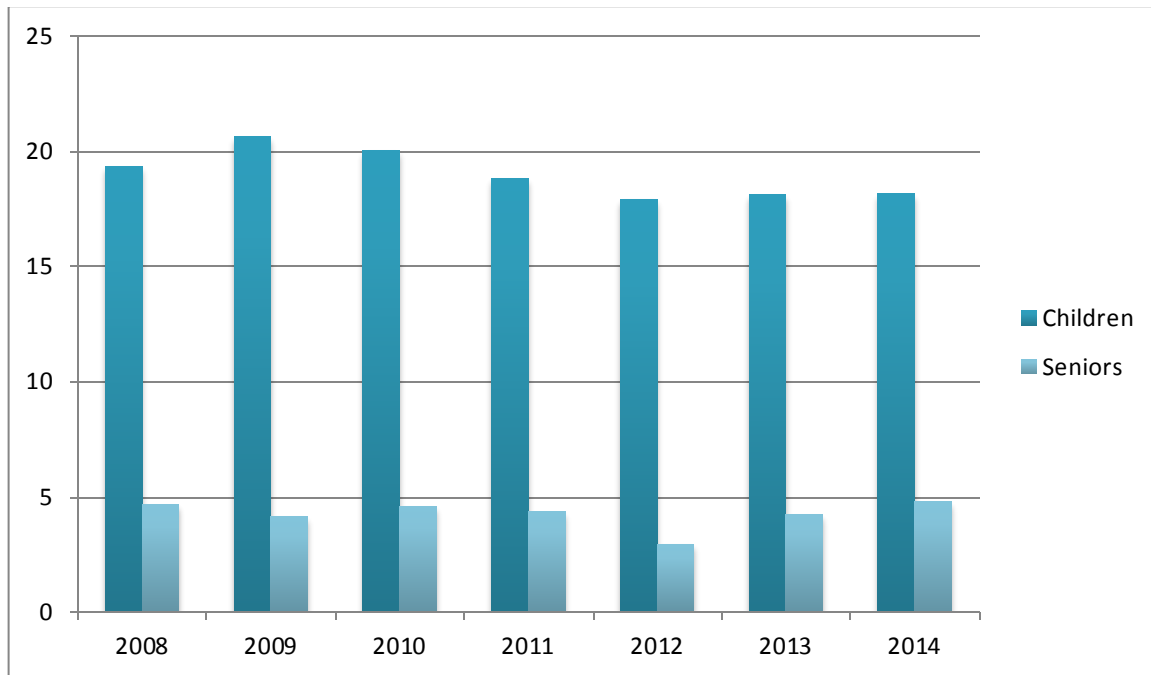
Furthermore, our region features a strong sense of belonging among its residents, where 3 in 4 people report a strong sense of belonging indicating stronger community connections than residents of British Columbia and Canada overall. This is an achievement that should be nurtured and built upon. Community involvement, whether in decision making processes or in the form of volunteering opportunities, can help build a sense of belonging. Vice versa, people who take ownership in their community are more likely to donate their time. Accessible and inclusive events and programs foster connectivity and social networks. Coordination of agencies and programs representing different cultures and community groups leads to increased interaction and networking. The 2015 Canada Winter Games in Prince George as well as more recent events, including Canada 150 celebrations and emergency response volunteerism during the 2017 forest fire season, are just some examples where the strong investment in the community among its citizens manifested itself.

# THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR

Statistics Canada has adopted a couple of definitions of low income. These definitions serve to avoid the term ‘poverty’, which is difficult to define internationally and relies largely on social consensus and judgment<sup>15</sup>. The Low Income Measure (LIM) constitutes 50% of the median household income after adjustments to household needs. The Low Income Cut-Offs (LICOs) are thresholds below which a family spends at least 20% percent more of their income on necessities than the average family<sup>16</sup>. The data included in this report is based on LIM<sup>17</sup>. Income and the gap between rich and poor affect many areas of life. It is, for example, proven to be closely linked to health and well-being<sup>18</sup>, and for that reason alone is important to be included in this report. It also gives some indication of expected spending habits of the population, which can be of interest to businesses and industry as well as service providers tasked with providing low cost options and financial supports.

## Vulnerable Population Groups

Figure 3.1 Percentage of Children and Seniors in Low Income



Statistics Canada. Table 111-0015. Characteristics of families, before-tax and after-tax low income status (based on census family low income measures, LIMs) by family type and family composition, annual, CANSIM.

A low income rate of 15.6% in 2014 means that almost 1 in 6 persons live at or below the LIM. While this is slightly lower than the provincial and national rates, it is a factor that has to be considered in all areas of action included in this report. While 4.8% of seniors live in low income, the rate of 18.1% of children in low income in 2014 demonstrates an overrepresentation of children living under financial stress.

Lone parent families are another population group at increased risk of facing low income situations. The median lone parent family income in 2014 is \$38,130. This is comparable to, or slightly below, provincial and national median lone parent income. While our region has seen stronger growth in median income in recent years, more than 1 in 3 lone parent families still fall into the low income category.

While food bank data was not available to us for Prince George, province-wide numbers provide a general idea of the increasing needs. These numbers also indicate some of the life circumstances that are shared by many food bank users and which may lead to conclusions concerning vulnerability. According to the Hunger Count report, the number of individuals assisted by food banks in British Columbia has gone up by over 30% over the last eight years. The 103,464 individuals who received food bank assistance in 2016 represent 2.2% of the total population. About one-third of those individuals are children under the age of 18. The two main sources of income in the assisted group are social assistance and disability-related income supports. More than two-thirds of them are rental market tenants. In 2014, 43% of tenants in Prince George spent 30% or more of their income on rent<sup>19</sup>. This confirms that the province-wide higher vulnerability among rental market tenants also applies in Prince George.

## Strategic Considerations

These insights lead to the question, what can be done? Strategies to alleviate financial stress on families and individuals approach the problem from two angles: one is to aim at providing affordable options to those with lower incomes; the other is to focus on root causes. When looking to provide low-cost options, one possibility is subsidizing. Housing, transportation, and medical costs are some of the core needs that may require subsidizing. However, transportation, for example, could also be an area where new and innovative additions to existing options may provide solutions for those living at or below LIM. In the area of sports and recreation programming, including music and arts, subsidized and affordable alternatives may also be of interest. There are already non-profit organizations, for example the YMCA, that collect donations to subsidize camps and regular programs for children who cannot otherwise afford the cost. Government grants and subsidies may be another avenue to establish subsidized programs for low-income families. Since a

lot of programs are already based on volunteer involvement, especially for families and children, it might also pay off to look at ways of strengthening the volunteer force in those areas to ensure sustainability of affordable programs.

For a lot of household necessities and clothing, thrift stores and donated items are one way to provide low cost options. Prince George features a number of second-hand shopping options as well as charitable organizations which collect donated items and pass them on to those who are in need. One way to further optimize low-cost shopping options may be to de-stigmatize them and somehow make them not only more acceptable but 'in' or 'cool'. Concerning food security, subsidized healthy choices may also be an option; however, innovative solutions involving community gardens and related life skill programs for cooking and preserving may have more lasting effects in the sense that they include education and lifestyle changes<sup>20</sup>.

The other main approach is to look at root causes of low income and financial strain, and one of the main areas of influence is education<sup>21</sup>. Low educational attainment is linked to low income, reduced employability, and lower health outcomes<sup>22</sup>. Statistics in 2011 show that 14% of individuals aged 25 to 64 in Prince George have no high school diploma<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, related data shows that Indigenous people and people with disabilities are among the most vulnerable groups and the most likely to drop out of high school and face low income situations as a result. A breakdown of the 2006 Prince George data distinguishes the numbers by gender and Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity and shows that Indigenous men and women are more likely to have less than a high school diploma (32.9% and 25.6% respectively) than non-Indigenous men and women (19.5% and 12.7%)<sup>24</sup>. The lack of a high school diploma limits employment chances and income. There is no easy and immediate solution for the underlying issues leading to this situation, but it should be kept in mind that, while subsidized and affordable options are important to help the community on a day-to-day basis, some strategic effort should be directed at strengthening educational attainment, especially for the vulnerable groups.

## HOUSING

Infrastructure, and especially housing, is important to quality of life and growth. Numbers on housing developments can be indicators of economic and population growth. At the same time, an inventory of the housing stock and its condition holds information about the capacity for growth. The topic of housing also goes beyond buildings and structures and includes some services and programs. Introducing the current housing situation in Prince George has to comprise the full housing continuum from homelessness to home ownership. A variety of data as well as less publicly known insights into programs and services are included in this section of the report<sup>25</sup>.

### Homelessness

Serving people on the lower end of the housing continuum, Prince George has four shelters with a total capacity of around 90 beds that are financed by BC Housing. These shelters used to be for night use only. In recent years, their services have been increased to offering three meals per day and staying open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, the Association Advocating for Aboriginal Women and Community (AWAC) shelter has tracked use patterns and reduced its summer opening hours during the day when few to no people were frequenting the shelter space. The freed up resources have been redirected to outreach.

Provincial and national numbers show a general decrease in shelters since 2009. BC Housing looks at shelters as access points to housing. Therefore, the focus in Prince George is less on the number of shelter beds and more on supported units with attached programs and services to help individuals access and maintain housing. There are concrete plans to increase supported housing units in the near future. One of the next steps up from shelter beds is the subsidized Homeless Prevention Program (HPP). BC Housing funds between 10 and 20 HPP units for each Prince George shelter as well as one full time equivalent position per organization for outreach and the administration of those units. With this system in place, shelter facilities are able to provide flexible services ranging from shelter beds, to support recovery space, and housing readiness programs and allow their clients to access those services as they need them and are ready for them.

Other initiatives include the provincial Homeless Outreach Program targeting vulnerable groups and the organizations they interact with, including youth, women and children exposed to violence, Indigenous individuals, corrections facility, and hospital. In 2016, the federal Housing First Initiative was brought to Prince George. It aims to provide market housing to homeless men and women who are considered hardest to house. In close cooperation with landlords willing to participate in the

program as well as the RCMP, the tenants receive life skills training to help them successfully maintain housing. Landlords are in direct contact with Housing First staff, and RCMP are informed about the tenants and their specific needs and backgrounds.

## Subsidized and Private Rental Markets

Another step up on the housing continuum is subsidized housing. BC Housing directly manages 256 affordable housing units in Prince George. Some space in those buildings is set aside for the above mentioned housing readiness programs and allows non-profit organizations to move their clients into more independent living situations while still maintaining close connections and providing support services.

The private rental market in Prince George consists of 3,167 units as of October 2016. It has seen a slightly higher vacancy than provincial or national vacancy rates over the past few years; the 2016 vacancy rate is 4.2%. According to the 2016 Housing and Community Profile, “Overall, considering affordability, overspending, income levels, overcrowding, and bedroom shortfalls, the rental situation in Prince George was considered to be ‘poor’.”<sup>26</sup>

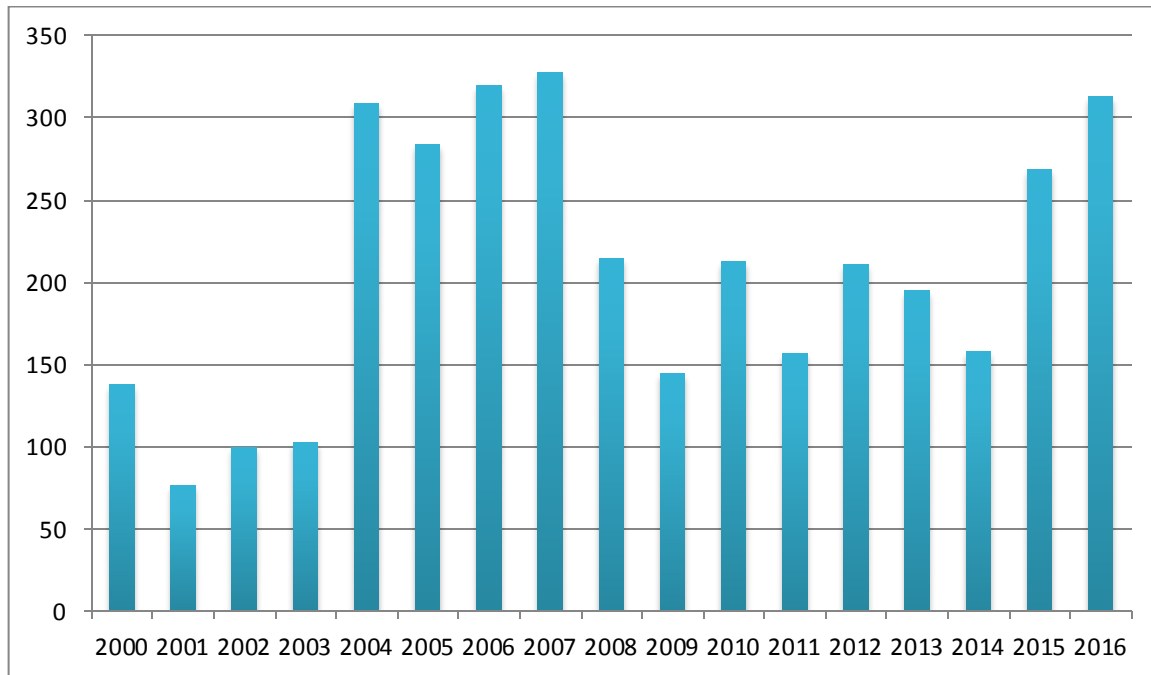
## Home Ownership and Housing Stock

According to 2016 Census data, the Prince George Census Agglomeration features 37,394 private dwellings and a population density of 4.9 individuals per square kilometer, which is close to the provincial average of 5.0 individuals per square kilometer.

Housing starts have seen an overall increase of 126.8% since 2000. Fluctuations throughout that time reflect the state of the economy with lows around 2001/2002/2003 and 2009. The year 2016 represents one of the highest numbers of housing starts since 2000 with 313 starts. Around 70% of occupied private dwellings in within Prince George City limits in 2011 are owned, while less than one-third are rented.



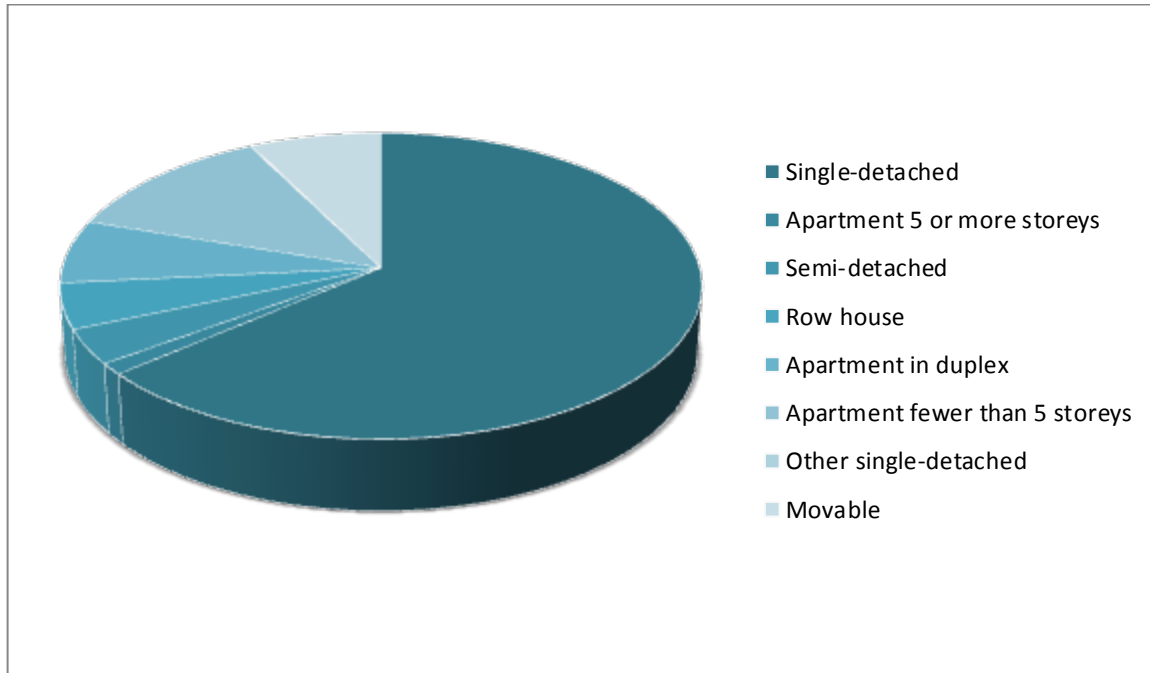
Figure 4.1 Housing Starts in Prince George



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 027-0050. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, housing starts, under construction and completions in large urban areas, monthly, CANSIM.

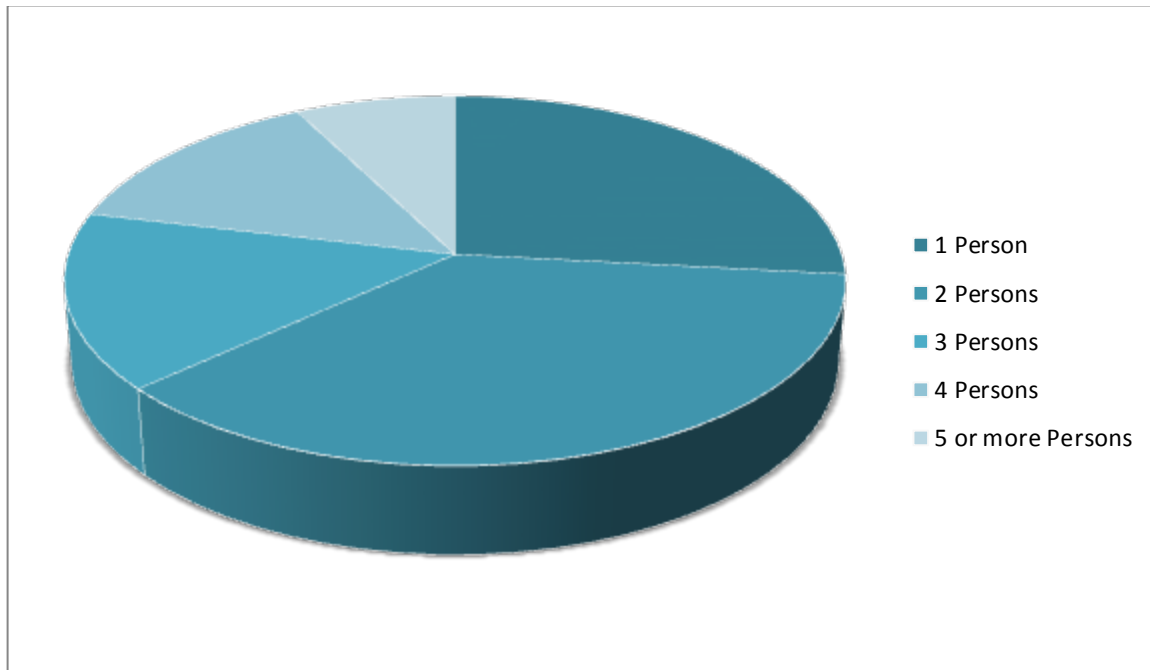
The size and condition of the existing housing stock holds valuable information about how it is suited to meet the needs of the community. Almost two-thirds of our housing stock in 2016 were single detached homes, and only 13% were apartments. Further painting a picture of mostly larger dwellings, over 70% of occupied private dwellings in 2011 featured three or more bedrooms. Around two-thirds of the housing stock within the city was at least 30 years old in 2011, but less than 8% required major repairs. As Figure 4.3 shows, almost two-thirds of Prince George's 2016 population live in one- and two-person households. The fact that larger homes dominate in a community with predominantly small households, suggests a mismatch in housing supply and demand. Moreover, larger homes are also not expected to cater to the growing senior population.

Figure 4.2 Type of Dwelling in Prince George in 2016



Source: Statistics Canada. 2016. Census Program.

Figure 4.3 Household Size in Prince George in 2016



Source: Statistics Canada. 2016. Census Program.

## Seniors Housing

Another part of the housing continuum included in this report is designated seniors housing. While it has already been established that the Prince George housing stock currently does not cater to the senior population, the City of Prince George is making an effort to increase accessibility in the housing stock and encourage building projects for seniors housing among others<sup>27</sup>. The Seniors Resource Centre lists a number of options for seniors<sup>28</sup>. These include home adaptation services to improve the current housing stock and adapt houses to seniors' needs as well as home care services, both of which allow seniors to remain in their own homes longer.

Rental housing options for seniors include some private as well as non-profit complexes. Furthermore, there are independent living options, supportive housing, and assisted living and complex care homes. The Northern Health Authority offers a total of 82 publicly subsidized units in two assisted living facilities as well as over 360 publicly subsidized units in five residential care facilities. In addition, at least seven private independent living complexes offer apartments and amenities, and at least four non-profit organizations manage affordable housing units specifically for seniors<sup>29</sup>. Projects currently in the development and building phases will add to the designated seniors' housing stock in Prince George<sup>30</sup>.

This shows that efforts are already underway to align the Prince George housing stock with the evolving needs of its citizens. Further strategic initiatives to improve the housing situation have to consider the full housing continuum and the various needs of people of all walks of life. Especially when developers are looking to invest in Prince George, it is important to communicate the needs of the community to ensure that the housing stock will serve the community well in years to come.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

This Vital Signs Brief has highlighted some of the unique features of Prince George and the challenges and opportunities that accompany them. In trying to connect the dots, we invite readers of all walks of life to think outside the box. Think long-term. Think opportunity. Re-think existing ideas and images of our city. The people of our community, their work, their health, their livelihoods, and our infrastructure are major factors in our quality of life and well-being. We hope to start conversations with this report and would like to stress again the need to consider root causes. Think about priorities and take into account the many opportunities our region has to offer.

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<sup>1</sup> A Statistics Canada map of the area is available at <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/geo/maps-cartes/pdf/S0504/2016S0504970.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. Special Requests. Provided to Community Foundations of Canada.

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Statistics Canada. 2001-2016. CANSIM Table 282-0123.

Statistics Canada. 2006. Aboriginal Population Profile for Prince George.

Statistics Canada. 2011. National Household Survey Profile British Columbia.

Statistics Canada. 2011. National Household Survey Profile Canada.

Statistics Canada. 2011. National Household Survey Profile Prince George.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. 2010. 2006 Aboriginal Population Profile for Prince George. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-638-x/2010004/article/11084-eng.htm>. Accessed 15 August 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Prince George Chamber of Commerce. 2013-2016. Top 40 Under 40. Available at <http://www.pgchamber.bc.ca/projects/top-40-under-40/>. Accessed on 20 July 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. 1981-2006. Census Profile Prince George.

Statistics Canada. 2011 and 2016. Labour Force Survey. Cariboo Economic Region.

<sup>6</sup> For more in-depth insights into volunteerism and the opportunities and risks it holds, see for example Ryser, L. and G. Halseth. 2014. On the Edge in Rural Canada: The Changing Capacity and Role of the Voluntary Sector. *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research* 5(1): 41-56.

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<sup>7</sup> Bell, D. 2017. Personal Conversation. Prince George, BC. 13 July 2017.

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- <sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. 2003-2014. CANSIM Table 105-0501.
- <sup>9</sup> Northern Health Authority. 2016. Chief Medical Health Officer's Health Status Report on Child Health. Northern Health 10-420-6096 (05/16).  
Northern Health Authority. 2017. Growing Up Healthy in Northern BC: Report on Northern Health's Community Consultation 2016. Northern Health 10-420-6103 (Rev02/17).
- <sup>10</sup> Kurrein, M., C. Li, and D. Rasali. 2016. *Food Costing in BC 2015*. Vancouver, BC: Prepared for the Population and Public Health Program: Provincial Health Services Authority.  
Ministry of Health Promotion. 2010. *Nutritious Food Basket: Guidance Document*. Ministry of Health Promotion: Standards, Programs & Community Development Branch. Queen's Printer for Ontario.  
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- <sup>11</sup> Provincial Health Services Authority. 2014. *Food Costing in BC 2013*. Vancouver, BC: Provincial Health Services Authority, Population and Public Health Program.
- <sup>12</sup> Canadian Institutes of Health Research. 2016. Mental Health and Wellness. Available at <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/47881.html>. Accessed on 28 July 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada. 2016. Lifetime and Past-Year Suicidal Thoughts Among Off-Reserve First Nations, Métis and Inuit Adults, Aged 18 Years and Over, Canada, 2012. *Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2012*. Statistics Canada: Ottawa, ON.
- <sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada. 2016. Social Determinants of Health for the Off-Reserve First Nations Population, 15 Years of Age and Older, 2012. *Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2012*. Statistics Canada: Ottawa, ON.
- <sup>15</sup> Fellegi, I.P. 1997. *On Poverty and Low Income*. Statistics Canada. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/13f0027x/13f0027x1999001-eng.htm>. Accessed on 24 July 2017.
- <sup>16</sup> Statistics Canada. 2015. Publications, 75F0002M, Low Income Lines, 2010-2011. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2012002-eng.htm>. Accessed on 24 July 2017.
- <sup>17</sup> Food Banks Canada. 2016. *Hungercount 2016: A Comprehensive Report on Hunger and Food Bank Use in Canada, and Recommendations for Change*. Food banks Canada: Mississauga, ON.  
Statistics Canada. 2000-2014. CANSIM Table 111-0015.
- <sup>18</sup> See for example Raphael, D. (Ed). 2016. *Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives*. Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.: Toronto, ON.
- <sup>19</sup> Community Development Institute. 2016. Housing and Community Profile Prince George, October 2016. BC Housing.
- <sup>20</sup> For more information on food security and program suggestions, see for example <https://foodsecurecanada.org/>, <http://beyondthemarket.ca/>,

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<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/keeping-bc-healthy-safe/food-safety/food-safety-sanitation-plans/food-security>.

<sup>21</sup> Uppal, S. 2017. Young Men and Women without a High School Diploma. *Insights on Canadian Society*. Statistics Canada. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2017001/article/14824-eng.htm>. Accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Statistics Canada. 2013. What Makes Canadians Healthy or Unhealthy? Available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health/what-makes-canadians-healthy-unhealthy.html>. Accessed on 11 August 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Statistics Canada. 2011. Prince George Community Profile. National Household Survey.

<sup>24</sup> Statistics Canada. 2006. Highest Level of Educational Attainment of People Aged 25 to 64 years, by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Identity and Sex, Prince George, 2006. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-638-x/2010004/tab/11084/tt-te1-eng.htm>. Accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Association Advocating for Aboriginal Women and Community. 06 July 2017. Personal Conversation. Prince George, BC.  
BC Housing. 06 July 2017. Personal Conversation. Prince George, BC.  
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. 2016. Housing Market Information Portal: Prince George, Primary Rental Market, Full Report. Available at <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmiportal/en/#Profile/4900/3/Prince%20George>. Accessed on 20 July 2017.  
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<sup>26</sup> Mochrie, C., M. Morris, and G. Halseth. 2016. *Housing and Community Profile Prince George, October 2016*. BC Housing. Community Development Institute, University of Northern British Columbia. Page 11.

<sup>27</sup> City of Prince George. Housing Incentives. Available at <https://princegeorge.ca/Business%20and%20Development/Pages/Housing/HousingIncentives.aspx>. Accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Seniors Resource Centre. 2014. Housing and Support Options for Seniors in Prince George. Available at <http://www.pgrta.bccta.ca/assets/notice-housing-options-for-pg-seniors-handout.pdf>. Accessed on 27 July 2017.

<sup>29</sup> NHA Assisted Living Facilities  
Laurier Manor – 32 publicly subsidized one bedroom units  
Gateway Lodge Assisted Living – 50 publicly subsidized units (bachelor and one bedroom)  
<https://www.northernhealth.ca/YourHealth/HomeandCommunityCare/HomeandCommunityCareServices/AssistedLiving/AssistedLivingResidences.aspx>

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NHA Residential Care Facilities

Gateway Lodge – 94 publicly subsidized beds

Jubilee Lodge – 66 publicly subsidized beds

Parkside Care – 58 publicly subsidized beds

Rainbow Lodge – 15 publicly subsidized beds, 4 respite rooms

Simon Fraser Lodge – 130 publicly subsidized beds

Rotary Hospice House – 10 beds

<https://www.northernhealth.ca/YourHealth/HomeandCommunityCare/HomeandCommunityCareServices/ResidentialCare/ResidentialCareFacilities.aspx#12880443-prince-george-rotary-hospice-house>

Private Independent Living

Riverbend Seniors Community

<http://theriverbend.com/rental-suites-and-floorplans/riverbend-prince-george/>

<https://www.bchousing.org/news?newsId=1479147717140>

Prince George Chateau

<http://www.atriaretirement.ca/retirement-communities/prince-george-chateau/>

Country Seniors Community

<http://www.countryseniorscommunity.com/index.html>

Asher Place Senior Residency (51 units)

<https://bccondos.net/2904-hopkins-rd>

Emmaus House (Independent/Supportive Living, 10 units)

<http://www.seniorlivingmag.com/housingdirectory/listings/show/10552>

Two Rivers Seniors Lodge

<http://www.tworiversseniorslodge.com/#/home>

Rodica Senior Home Care House

<https://www.pearlychoice.com/senior-living/BC/PrinceGeorge/rodica-senior-home-care-house?cares=>

Non-Profit, affordable housing

Elizabeth Fry Housing Society, manages a total of 128 housing units, some of them for seniors

<http://www.pgefry.bc.ca/programs/prince-george/housing-society/>

Aboriginal Housing Society Prince George

<http://ahspg.ca/>

Alward Place, including assisted living services

<http://www.assistedliving.com/british-columbia/prince-george/alward-place-extension/>

Fort George Manor, 12 units

<http://www.stpaulfoundation.ca/101/businesses/11687>

<sup>30</sup> Dacre, C. 2016. New Prince George Seniors Housing to Open in 2017. *My Prince George Now*, July 6, 2017. Available at <http://www.myprincegeorgenow.com/32965/new-prince-george-seniors-housing-open-2017/>. Accessed on 27 July 2017.

