

HEALTH INEQUALITIES DATA TOOL FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is the Health Inequalities Data Tool?

The Health Inequalities Data Tool allows you to extract, download and print data on health inequalities in Canada. It provides a portrait of inequalities in social determinants of health and health outcomes across a range of population groups. The data tool is a key product of the **Pan-Canadian Health Inequalities Reporting Initiative**. It represents the most comprehensive data resource on health inequalities currently available in Canada.

2. Who is involved in this Data Tool?

The development of this Data Tool was made possible through the collaboration of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the Pan-Canadian Public Health Network (PHN), Statistics Canada, and the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI).

3. What are some potential uses for the Data Tool?

The Data Tool can help program and policy analysts identify which health issues and which populations are experiencing the most pronounced inequalities, and inform intersectoral priorities for action both within and across federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions. It can help generate research questions and hypotheses about the relationships between specific indicators of health status and/or social determinants and many social stratifiers. The Data Tool can also inform surveillance activities related to available indicators.

4. Does the Data Tool measure health inequalities or health inequities?

Health inequalities are defined by the World Health Organization as measurable differences in health status or health determinants between different population groups. Health inequalities can be attributed to biological variations, free choice, or to external environments and conditions mainly outside the control of the individuals concerned. *Health inequities* refer to health inequalities that are socially produced, unjust, and preventable.

While health inequalities can be readily and systematically measured, the identification of health inequities requires additional considerations of fairness, social values, and public policy, and cannot be determined solely through quantitative methods. The Data Tool focuses on measuring, monitoring, and reporting on health inequalities in Canada as a necessary step towards identifying and taking action to address health inequities.

5. How were the indicators in this Data Tool selected?

The indicators available in the Data Tool build on the list of indicators recommended by the Public Health Network (PHN) in its 2010 *Indicators of Health Inequalities* report. The Data Tool includes PHN indicators for which pan-Canadian data are readily available. It also measures some indicators in multiple ways (e.g. diabetes is assessed as self-reported and diagnosed outcome, obesity is presented as self-reported as well as measured). The Data Tool also adds some indicators of particular relevance to population health inequalities (e.g. health-adjusted life expectancy, functional health, etc.). For an overview of all indicators in the tool, please see the "Map of Available Indicators" document:

<https://health-infobase.canada.ca/health-inequalities/Indicat>

6. At what geographic level is data available in this tool?

Due to methodological limitations, the Data Tool contains health inequalities data at the national and provincial/territorial levels only. For most indicators, multiple years of data were combined to attain sample sizes large enough to support disaggregation by sex and other

stratifier variables of interest. However, even with multiple years of data, sample sizes were not sufficient to allow for systematic disaggregation at the sub-provincial/territorial levels.

7. Is data available for provinces and territories with small populations?

Yes, all reportable data for each province and territory are available on the Health Inequalities Data Tool. However, not all indicators have data that are reportable for certain provinces and territories (because disaggregation of small populations may reduce numbers to a size that could compromise privacy).

8. Does the Data Tool enable users to compare data across different provinces and territories?

Yes. There is a “Geographic Comparison” tab that allows you to compare data across provinces and territories, and also compare these provincial/territorial data with overall national results. Additionally, you can download the entire table for specific provinces and make your own comparisons and charts.

9. Why does the Data Tool combine data from many years?

Many years of data are used to ensure a large enough sample. This allows data disaggregation across three levels at once: social stratifier, sex, and national/provincial/territorial level. The data are drawn from the 2015-2020 period, although specific years used vary depending on the specific indicator and data source.

10. Will this tool help users explore the causal links between indicators and stratifiers?

No. The data analysis conducted to create this tool was cross-sectional in nature and examined health distribution and patterns throughout the population. As such, the tool provides a baseline assessment of health inequalities in Canada. The tool will help you generate questions, but no causality is assessed or implied.

11. How often will the Data Tool be updated?

This version of the Data Tool provides a baseline for monitoring the state of health inequalities in Canada. Our intent is to collect data every 5 years so that comparisons to this baseline can be made and inequalities can be monitored over time.

12. Will additional indicators be included in future versions of the Data Tool?

Future versions of the Data Tool may include additional indicators. The decision to include a new indicator will be based on a number of considerations, including data availability, policy relevance, alignment with the PHN’s *Indicators of Health Inequalities* Report, and feedback from technical experts.

13. I am having trouble understanding the measures used in this tool (such as rate ratio and rate difference). What should I do?

Please see the “Summary Measures” document for an overview of these measures, how they are calculated and how to interpret them:

<https://health-infobase.canada.ca/health-inequalities/inequality-measures>

14. Are data on Indigenous populations available in this tool?

Where possible, the Data Tool includes data on First Nations (off-reserve), Inuit, and Métis populations currently collected through Statistics Canada surveys (e.g., the Canadian Community Health Survey). For several indicators where individual-level information on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis identity is not available, data will be reported based on area-based measures of Indigenous identity (i.e. geographic areas with higher populations of Indigenous peoples).

Corresponding data for First Nations living on reserve are collected through the First Nations Regional Health Survey (RHS), under the custodianship of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC). With the intention of providing context to the First Nations (on-reserve) data, RHS data are not included in the Data Tool but will be featured in future reporting products developed by the Pan-Canadian Health Inequalities Reporting Initiative in collaboration with the First Nations Information Governance Centre.

15. What is an area-based measure?

When socioeconomic information is unavailable at the individual-level, area-based measures can be a useful alternative. To produce an area-based measure, socioeconomic data at the census tract level is assigned to an individual (respondent) using their postal code. In the Data Tool, income, education, deprivation, immigrant status, and Indigenous identity are area-based measures for a number of indicators, particularly those (e.g., low weight at birth) that were compiled from Vital Statistics databases. All stratifiers that are area-based measures are explicitly noted as such to avoid confusion.

16. Are confidence intervals available for all of the data?

Yes, 95% confidence intervals are available, when applicable.

17. Can I download the data?

Yes. Charts can be downloaded as images (.png files). The data tables can be downloaded as .csv files which can be opened using standard spreadsheet programs (e.g. Microsoft Excel).

18. How can I optimize my experience when using this tool?

If you are using Internet Explorer, please ensure that your compatibility view settings are off. We recommend that users, after clicking on the "Go to the Health inequality Data" button from homepage, drill down the data as needed by modifying the selection menus located in the upper left corner of their screen.

19. How does this project relate to other health inequalities reporting initiatives lead by Statistics Canada and the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI)?

Statistics Canada and CIHI have produced complementary tools that disaggregate health-related data. An example of this is CIHI's *Trends in Income-Related Health Inequalities in Canada* report, which focusses on 15 indicators of income-related health inequalities trends over approximately 10 years.

The Pan-Canadian Health Inequalities Reporting Initiative complements these other initiatives through its broad scope and depth of reporting. The Data Tool presenting over 160 indicators of health status and social determinants, each disaggregated by as many as 14 disaggregators relevant to health equity, including less commonly reported variables such as sexual orientation, cultural/racial background and Indigenous identity. Additionally, six unique summary measures of inequality are available.

Ongoing collaboration between CIHI, Statistics Canada and PHAC is ensuring complementarity and relevancy of products produced by these respective organizations.

20. Who can I contact for more information on this tool?

For more information on this Data Tool, please contact the Public Health Agency of Canada's Social Determinants of Health Division at:
health.inequalities-inegalites.en.sante@phac-aspc.gc.ca