

# Majority of seniors live in their own homes: report

## Percentage of seniors living as couples also rises as men are living longer, Statistics Canada says

BY KIM PEMBERTON, VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 24, 2014

true



Badur, 75, and Gillian, 69, Jaffer in their Kitsilano condo. A Statistics Canada report shows more seniors are living together as couples (since men are living longer).

**Photograph by:** Mark van Manen, Vancouver Sun

Badur and Gillian Jaffer recently celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary and are doing all they can to stay healthy so they can remain together in their senior years.

The Vancouver couple are typical of Canadians 65 years of age and older, the vast majority of whom live together and in private households.

A Statistics Canada report issued Monday found that 92 per cent of all seniors lived in their own homes and eight per cent lived in collective dwellings.

It also found that between 1981 and 2011, the proportion of seniors who still live with their spouse or partner had increased. In 2011, 76 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women lived as part of a couple — up from 75 per cent of men and 40 per cent of women in 1981.

“The increased share of seniors who live in a couple may be related to higher life expectancy. Although women still live longer than men, life expectancy has been increasing more rapidly for men during the past three decades,” the report noted.

Badur, 75, and Gillian, 69, live in a Kitsilano condominium and try to stay active and eat healthy in order to avoid ever having to move into a retirement home.

“Both of our parents managed to remain living in their own house and hopefully we’ll be in the same situation,” said Gillian Jaffer.

[www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140224/dq140224a-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140224/dq140224a-eng.htm)

“We hear endless stories of couples, together 40 or 50 years, and they’re separated and put into different facilities. I believe it has a devastating effect and leads to an earlier departure of this earth.”

According to the Statistics Canada national study, called “Emerging trends in living arrangements and conjugal unions for current and future seniors, 1981 to 2011,” the proportion of seniors living in collective dwellings declined between 1981 and 2011, especially among older seniors. In 2011, 35 per cent of women 85 years of age and older lived in a collective home, compared to 41 per cent in 1981. The proportion of men age 85 and over living in a collective home also declined, to 23 per cent from 29 per cent.

Another factor in the rise of the percentage of seniors living as couples was the growing share of senior couples that are closer in age.

In 2011, of the 2.8 million Canadians aged 65 and over, 49 per cent had an age difference of three years or less — up from 40 per cent in 1981

The study also found the proportion of seniors who were divorced or separated rose from 4 per cent to 12 per cent between 1981 and 2011. That trend has been referred to as “grey divorce” and even among the population aged 85 and over, the proportion of divorce or separation had increased from 1 per cent in 1981 to 4 per cent in 2011.

“Most seniors and future seniors have experienced just one union in their lifetime ...,” the report said. One way to express the longevity of unions is to examine the proportion of seniors who reached their golden anniversary — 50 years of marriage. In 2011, 21 per cent of women and 10 per cent of men aged 65 to 74 had reached this milestone, either with a current or past marriage. Not surprisingly a much larger share of seniors aged 75 and over — 74 per cent — reached this milestone, with little difference between men and women.

The study also found that of the 4.6 million seniors aged 65 and over, about 166,000 lived common-law in 2011.

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# LETTERS

## Home support key to care

*Re: Majority of elderly live in own homes; report, Feb. 25*

I commend Kim Pemberton and The Vancouver Sun for making seniors issues a front-page story. With 92 per cent of all seniors living in their own homes, it is all the more important for home support to be a major priority in our public health care system.

Home support saves taxpayers millions of dollars each year in acute care costs and greatly improves seniors' quality of life.

B.C.'s ombudsperson released a report on seniors' care in 2012 outlining vitally needed changes in home support. In the almost two years since the report was released, the government has yet to fully implement even one of the recommendations. The solutions are there — it's time to act.

**DARRYL WALKER**

*President, B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)*

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