

# Essential facts about the census

On Monday, Statistics Canada will start sending out census letters and packages. One in four households will receive the newly restored long-form census. **Tara Carman** reports on what Statistics Canada's Marc Hamel says about what you need to do when you get the letter and why it matters.

**Q** How do I complete the census?

**A** Statistics Canada will send notices in the mail next week informing households whether they must fill out the short-form or long-form census. The notice will include instructions for completing the census online or requesting a printed package by mail. In 2011, just over half of Canadians completed the census online. The 2016 goal is for 65 per cent of households to do so.

**Q** Who must complete it?

**A** Canadian citizens, landed immigrants, refugee claimants and people who hold a work or study permit.

**Q** How long will it take?

**A** The 10-question short-form census generally takes about 10 minutes. The 60-question long-form takes closer to half an hour. Households that receive the long-form are chosen at random.

**Q** When is census day?

**A** May 10. This means when the survey asks about residency or marital status, for example, it refers to the situation on May 10, 2016. The census can be thought of as a snapshot of how Canada looked on that day.



Marc Hamel, above, is director-general of Statistics Canada's census of population program, which is sending out short- and long-form census questionnaires to residents of Canada in May to get a snapshot of the population for use by policy-makers at all levels of government.

**Q** How is the information from the census used?

**A** It tells policy-makers at all levels of government which areas are gaining and losing which types of people. This affects all kinds of things, from the amount of money Ottawa gives the provinces for health care, to electoral riding boundaries, to where local officials place schools, services for the elderly or specific language groups.

**Q** How does the 2016 census differ from the 2011?

**A** The 2016 long-form census is once again mandatory, meaning individuals who do not complete it could face penalties. The previous Conservative government replaced the long-form census

with a voluntary National Household Survey in 2010, prompting an outcry from critics who claimed the move would result in under-representation of small communities and some ethnic groups who are less likely to respond to surveys. Critics also argued the change would make it impossible to compare 2011 data with previous years. On Nov. 5, 2015, the incoming Liberal government restored the mandatory long-form census.

Other changes for 2016 include that this year's survey will not ask about household income, with Statistics Canada instead opting to obtain that information directly from the Canada Revenue Agency. The 2016 long-form also does not include a question about religion, but this question will be back in 2021.

**Q** What happens if I don't complete the census?

**A** People who are out of the country on May 10 will not be captured by the census. Those who have not submitted by the end of May or early June may get a home visit from a properly-identified enumerator, who can provide a survey and help people complete it. Statistics Canada also provides a help line with service in many languages. In 2011, the census had a completion rate of 98 per cent.

Those who refuse to complete the census could face a fine of up to \$500 or up to three months in jail. Such refusals, however, are rare — in 2011 there were between 60 and 70 — and Statistics Canada refers such cases to the courts. Most of the time, judges simply issue a court order requiring the person to complete the census, though in 2011 there were a handful of fines.

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