

# VITAL SIGNS PRINCE GEORGE: TELLING OUR STORY



**VitalSigns**<sup>®</sup>

Community foundations taking the pulse of  
Canadian communities.



PRINCE GEORGE  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION  
all for our community.

COVER IMAGE: UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN  
BRITISH COLUMBIA, PRINCE GEORGE, BC

# INTRODUCTION

We feel that it is important for our 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 harsh climate, long distance to larger metropolitan areas, and lower population density.<sup>1</sup> 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 our unique 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.

**THE METHODOLOGY** applied in this report includes data searches in existing databases such as Statistics Canada's Census program, as well as reports by local and regional organizations, and personal conversations with some representatives of community organizations to fill in information where statistical data did not paint the complete picture. A full list of sources is included at the end of the report and can be used as a starting point for further research.



## About Vital Signs

*Vital Signs* is a national program led by community foundations and coordinated by Community Foundations of Canada that leverages community knowledge to measure the vitality of our communities and support action towards improving our quality of life.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO HELPED MAKE THIS REPORT POSSIBLE.

### PROJECT TEAM:

**JULIA GOOD, RESEARCH, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**AL LEFEBVRE, VICE PRESIDENT, PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

**MARLEEN MORRIS, CO-DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**CATHERINE PENNINGTON, PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, VITAL SIGNS CHAIR**

**TERESA SAUNDERS, PRESIDENT, PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

## About Your Community Foundation

The Prince George Community Foundation was founded in 1995 and is an independent, volunteer-driven, charitable organization that brings together people who care about their community. As a member of the Community Foundations of Canada, we facilitate philanthropy by partnering with donors to build permanent endowment funds that support community projects concerned with health, sports, recreation, arts, culture, social services and the environment.

**CINDY STOROZINSKI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

**TIM TRIBE, PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

RESEARCH:  
**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

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*It is our goal to identify challenges and opportunities and to connect the dots to ensure maximum well-being for every member in our community.*





## PEOPLE & WORK

This indicator builds understanding of the socioeconomic fabric of Prince George and how it has evolved 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 & WELL-BEING

Health, both physical and mental, is an important part of the quality of life in the community and can serve as an indicator of opportunities for improvement in 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.



## THE GAP BETWEEN RICH & 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.





## MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT:



Established in 1995, the Prince George Community Foundation manages charitable gifts from donors whose generosity allows us to create permanent income-earning funds. The proceeds from these funds are then distributed as grants to charitable organizations focused on Health, Education, Arts and Culture, Sports and Recreation, Local Environment, and Social Services. To date, we have granted more than one million dollars to Prince George non-profit organizations.

As an organization that is focused on giving back to our community, it is important that we seek to understand where the areas of greatest need are. With this in mind, we are pleased to present our first Vital Signs Report, a community check-up that measures the vitality of our city, identifies concerns, and supports action on issues that are critical to our quality of life. This, our first report, called a "Vital Brief", connects philanthropy to community needs in the following areas:

- People & Work
- Health & Well-Being
- Gap Between Rich & Poor
- Housing

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I want to thank Board Member and Project Lead, Catherine Pennington, for her dedication and hard work in bringing our first Vital Signs Report to fruition. Thank you too, to the many community partners and researchers who contributed so much along the way.

We hope you find the report both interesting and helpful but even more, we hope it sparks many deep conversations about ways to make Prince George an even better place to live - for all.

Respectfully,  
Teresa Saunders  
President

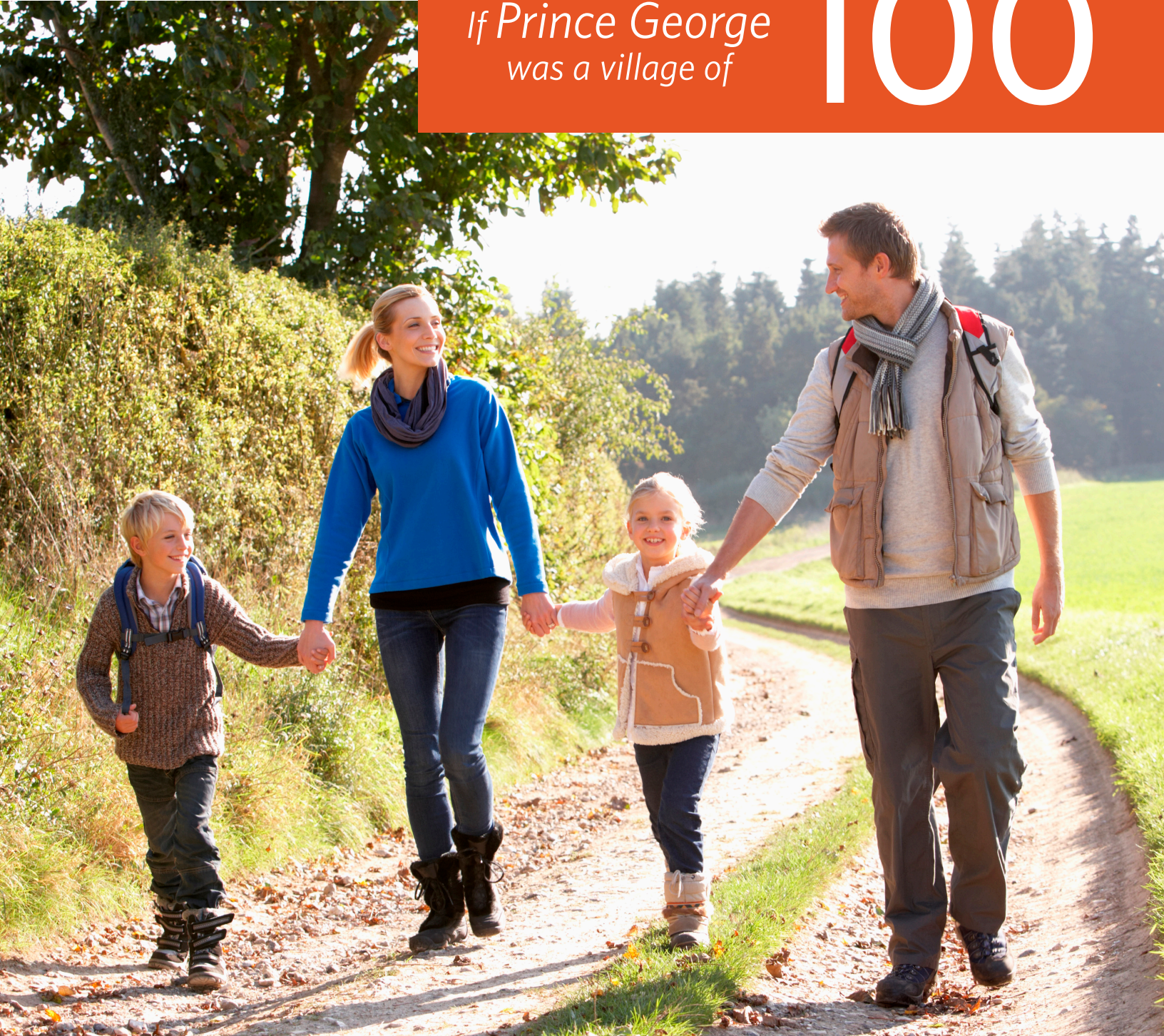


# COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Imagine Prince George was a village of 100 people who represent all of our community's characteristics and realities! This snapshot highlights some of the main findings about the people who make up our population. See our age structure, education, income, cultural background, and health in one glance before diving into more detailed information on the following pages.

*If Prince George  
was a village of*

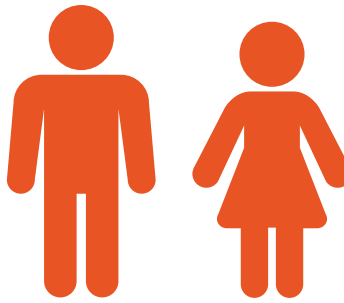
# 100





50

MALE



50

FEMALE



24

YOUTH 19 AND UNDER



62

AGED 20-64



14

SENIORS 65+

 3 to 4 of those living in low income

 9 of those have no high school diploma

 1 of those living in low income



12

Are of Indigenous identity



10

Immigrants



16

Living in Low Income



19

Adults are Obese



17

Smokers



50

Adults are physically active in their spare time

5

Adults have Diabetes



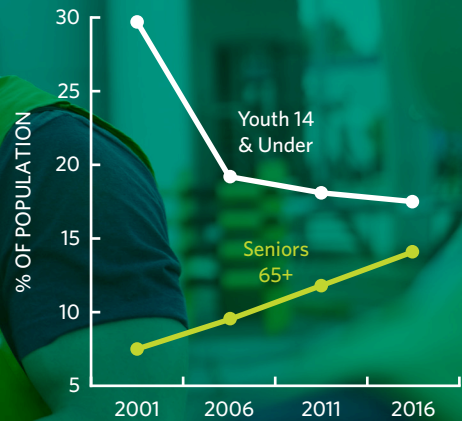
# PEOPLE & WORK

In this section, we will paint a picture of who comprises 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>

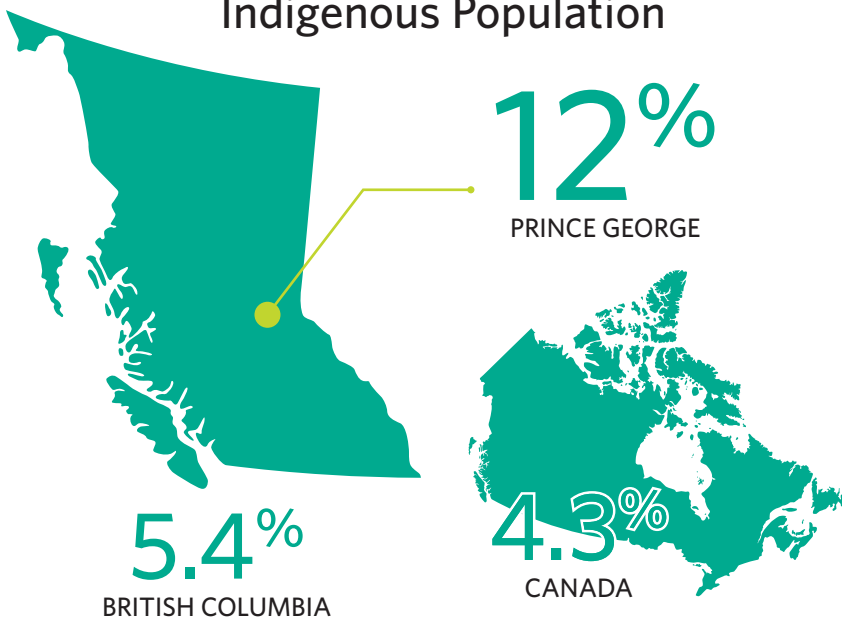
Prince George's total population has grown from just over 75,000 in 1996 to 86,622 in 2016



Prince George Population Age Shift Over Time



## Indigenous Population



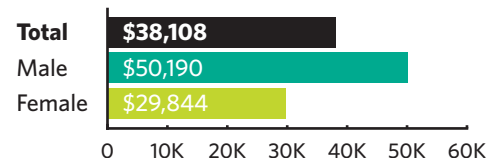
Prince George has a comparatively large Indigenous population with 12% identifying as Indigenous in 2011 compared to 5.4% in British Columbia and 4.3% in Canada.

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. Female median income in 2015 was only at 60% of male income.

## Median Family Income

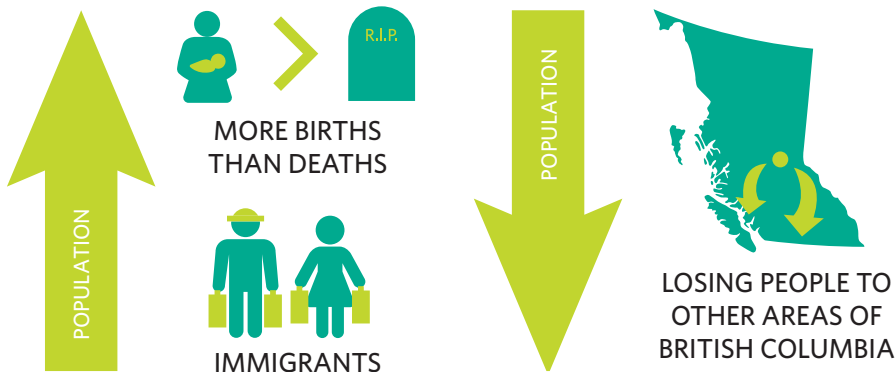


MEDIAN TOTAL INCOME (INDIVIDUALS IN 2015)





## Main Factors in Population Change within the Region



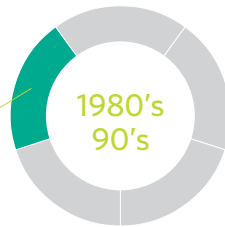
Migration numbers for Fraser-Fort George indicate that the main growth in this region continues to stem from natural increase, i.e. more births than deaths. While immigrants and people from other provinces also contribute a little bit to our growth, the region has been and is still losing people to other 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.

Prince George's unemployment rate in 2016



## Employment by Sector

20% OR 1 IN 5 JOBS IN MANUFACTURING



In the 1980s and 90s, manufacturing was one of the main employers for the working population in Prince George, providing work for up to 1 in 5 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 1 in 4 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 1 in 4 workers. Business, finance, and administration are another strong sector putting well over 10% of the labour force to work, while all other areas are less significant in terms of the amount of people they employ.



## CONNECT THE DOTS

Employment and income affect many other areas of life. Let's connect the dots to learn how we can best support our community to grow and prosper.

1. Who is having trouble entering the labour force, and why?
2. How do education and skill levels impact job options and opportunities, and why?
3. Who does not have an adequate income, and why?
4. How should we invest for greatest long-term impact to break the cycle of un/underemployment and low income?

# HEALTH & WELL-BEING

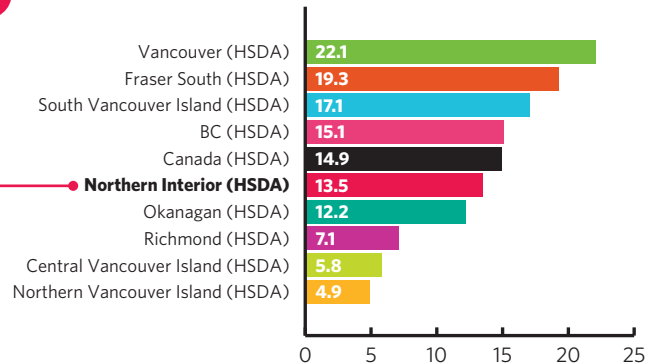
Information in this section comprises three different angles. These include healthy lifestyle and habits, diagnosed and perceived illness and wellness, and programs, services, and local attributes pertaining to health and well-being. Information is provided for the Northern Interior Health Service Delivery Area since it was not available for Prince George alone.<sup>3</sup>



IN 2014, 13.5% OF THE POPULATION AGED 12 & OVER reported not having a regular medical doctor.



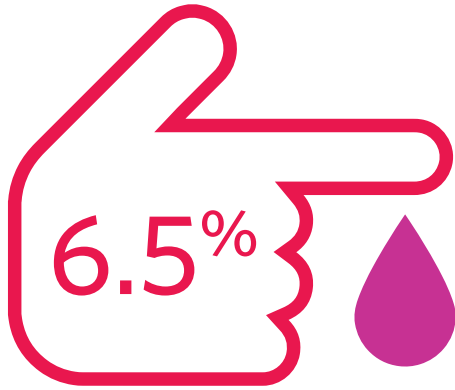
**13.5%** Do not have a regular medical doctor



IN 2014, 1 IN 4 ADULTS IS OBESE in our health service delivery area,



In 2014, 6.5% of the population in the Northern Interior Health Service Delivery Area were **DIAGNOSED WITH A TYPE OF DIABETES.**



## Physical Activity



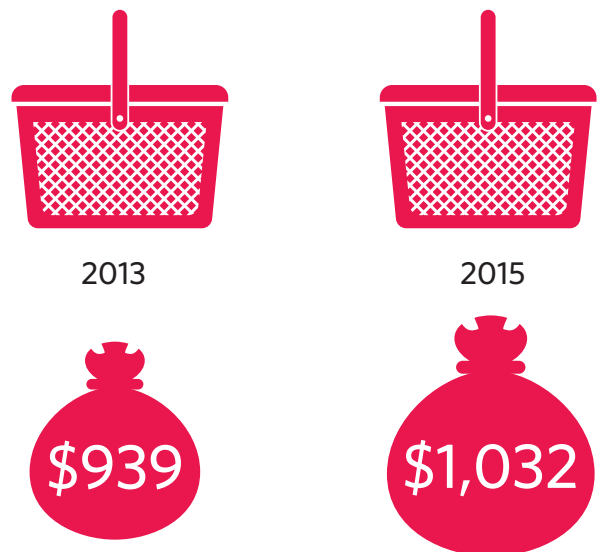
**MORE THAN 2 IN 3 PEOPLE AGED 12 & OVER** report being physically active in 2014. These numbers are well above those for BC and Canada.



**MORE THAN HALF OF THE POPULATION DOES NOT EAT THE RECOMMENDED AMOUNT OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES.**



## Average monthly cost of a nutritious food basket



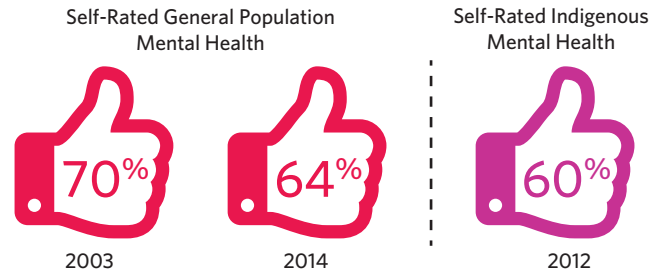
The average monthly cost of a nutritious food basket for a family of four in the Northern Health Region has gone up from \$939 in 2013 to \$1032 in 2015, and we are now the most expensive region in the province.

**1 IN 5 CANADIANS WILL DIRECTLY EXPERIENCE MENTAL ILLNESS**, and nearly everyone is affected through close friends or family members. Indigenous people are statistically especially vulnerable when it comes to mental illness and in particular suicidal thoughts.



Self-rated mental health in our region has seen a decline since 2003. In the early 2000s, well above 70% of people aged 12 and over reported good mental health. By 2014,

**LESS THAN 64% FELT THEY WERE IN GOOD MENTAL HEALTH.** While specifically 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.



**PERCEIVED LIFE STRESS** for residents of the Northern Interior Health Services Delivery Area appears to be well below that of the province and the country, and 9 out of 10 people are satisfied with their lives.







## Sense of Belonging

3 OUT OF 4

3 IN 4 PEOPLE REPORT A STRONG SENSE OF BELONGING INDICATING STRONGER COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS and ownership than residents of BC and Canada overall.



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.<sup>4</sup>



## CONNECT THE DOTS

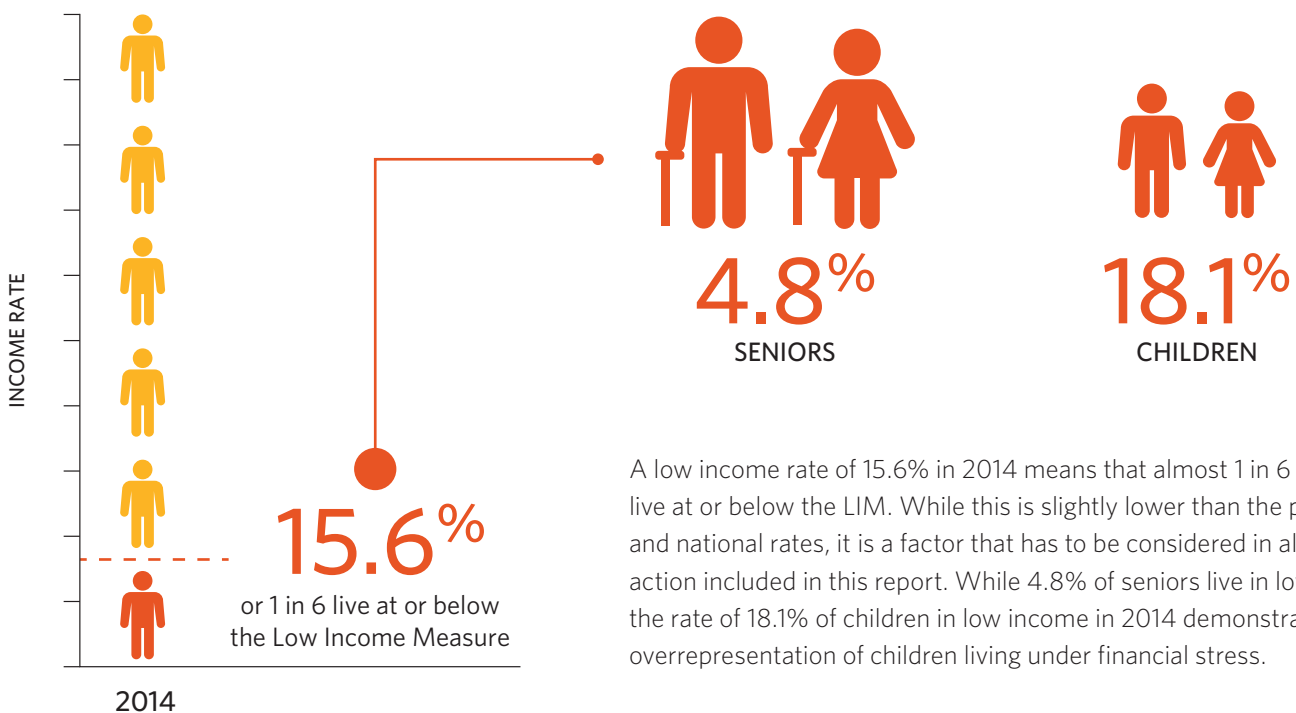
Health and well-being is connected to other areas in this report. Let's connect the dots and find out how we can further enhance our community's quality of life.

1. *Is there enough awareness of physical health and wellness? If not, why?*
2. *Is there enough awareness of mental health and well-being? If not, why?*
3. *What can we do to enhance awareness and action?*
4. *How should we invest for greatest long-term impact to enhance physical and mental wellness?*

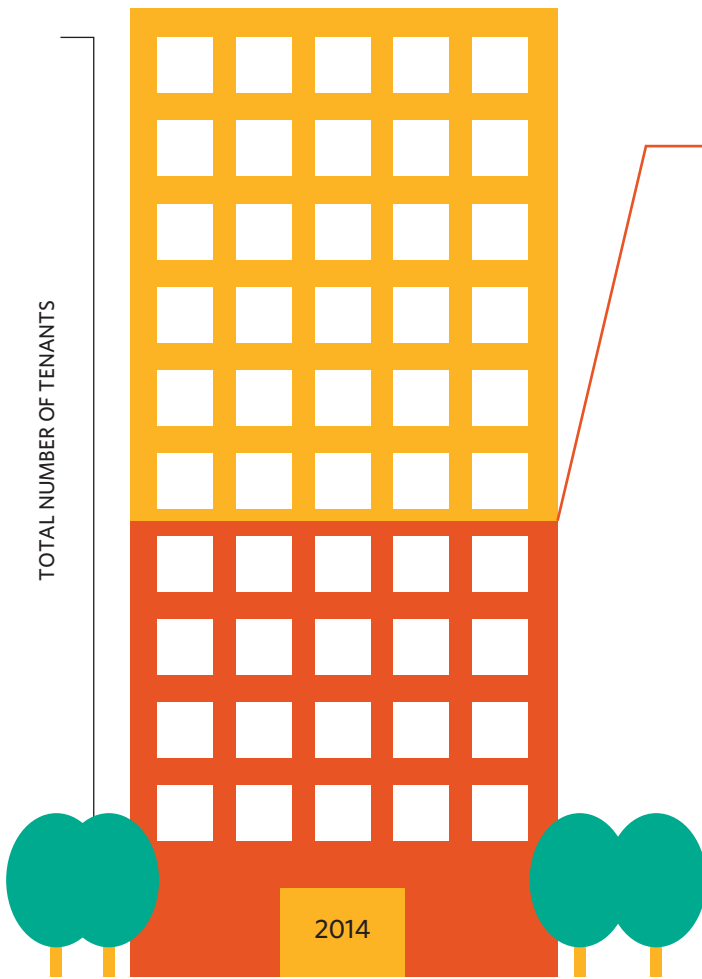


# THE GAP BETWEEN RICH & POOR

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, 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. 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 judgement. 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. The data included in this report is based on LIM.<sup>5</sup>



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.

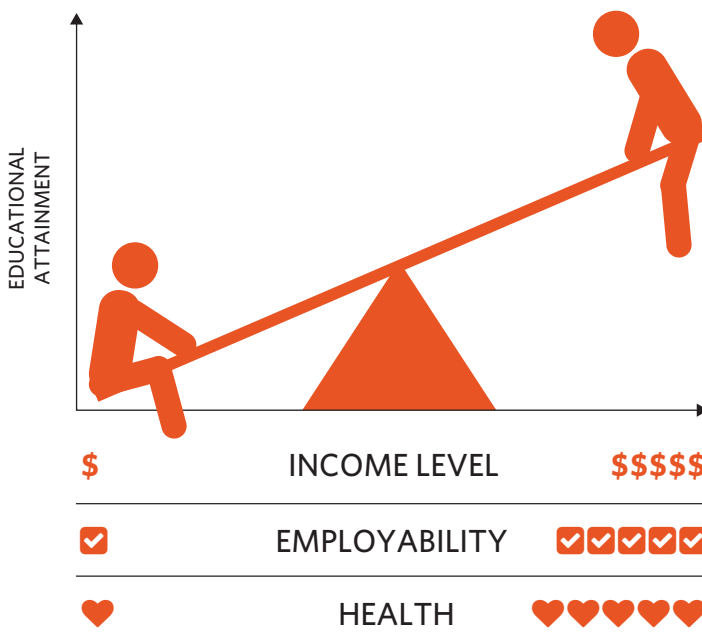


**43%**  
OF  
TENANTS

**Spent 30%**  
or more of their income on rent



LOW EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IS LINKED TO LOW INCOME, REDUCED EMPLOYABILITY, AND LOWER HEALTH OUTCOMES



## CONNECT THE DOTS

Education affects all other areas! Let's connect the dots and find out how we can tackle root causes of our challenges.

1. What are the barriers to education?
2. Who is least likely to have educational attainments? Why?
3. How should budgets be allocated when it comes to immediate help versus long-term improvements?



# HOUSING

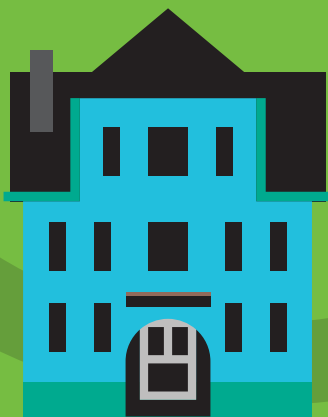
Infrastructure, and especially housing, is important to quality of life and growth. Numbers on housing developments can be indicators of economic and population growth. At the same time, an inventory of the housing stock and its condition holds information about the capacity for growth. The topic of 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>6</sup>



## Housing Continuum

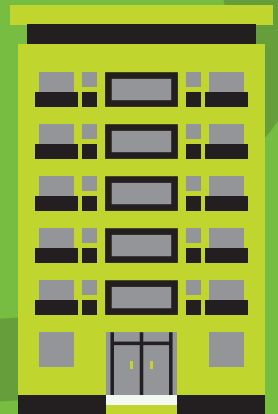


HOMELESSNESS



SHELTERS

Prince George has four shelters with a total capacity of around 90 beds. These shelters offer three meals per day and stay open 24 hours a day, seven days a week where use justifies it. Provincial and National numbers show a general decrease in shelters since 2009. BC has been focusing on increasing supported housing units with attached programs and services. Thanks to program and administrative funding, shelter facilities are able to provide fluid 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. Programs aiming to house people permanently include the Homeless Prevention Program with 10 to 20 units at each shelter and some other non-profit organizations, the Homeless Outreach program that connects vulnerable individuals with organizations serving them, and the federal Housing First initiative, which places hard-to-house individuals in market units in collaboration with landlords and RCMP.

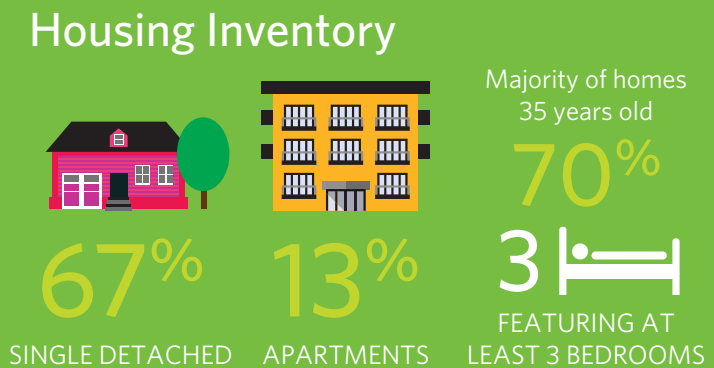
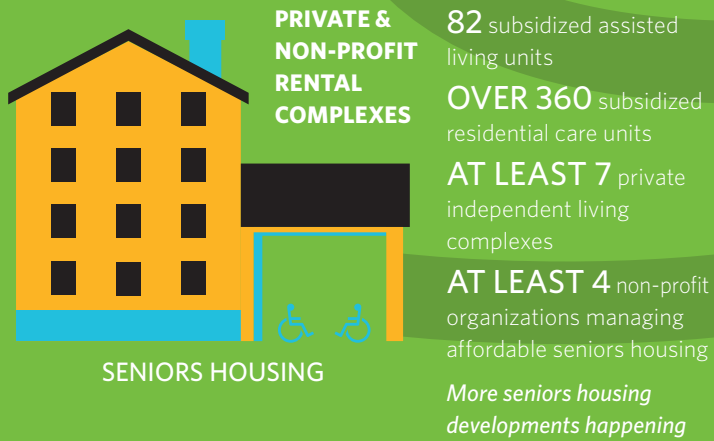
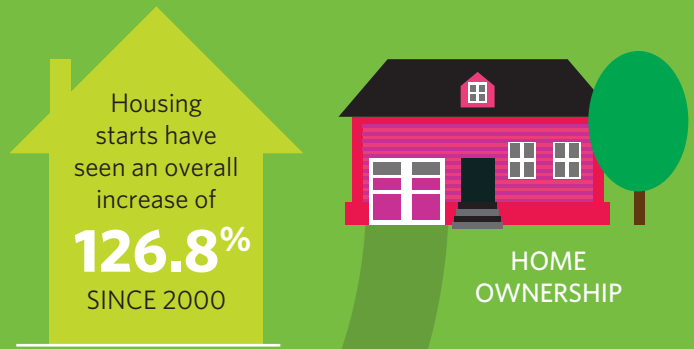


SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

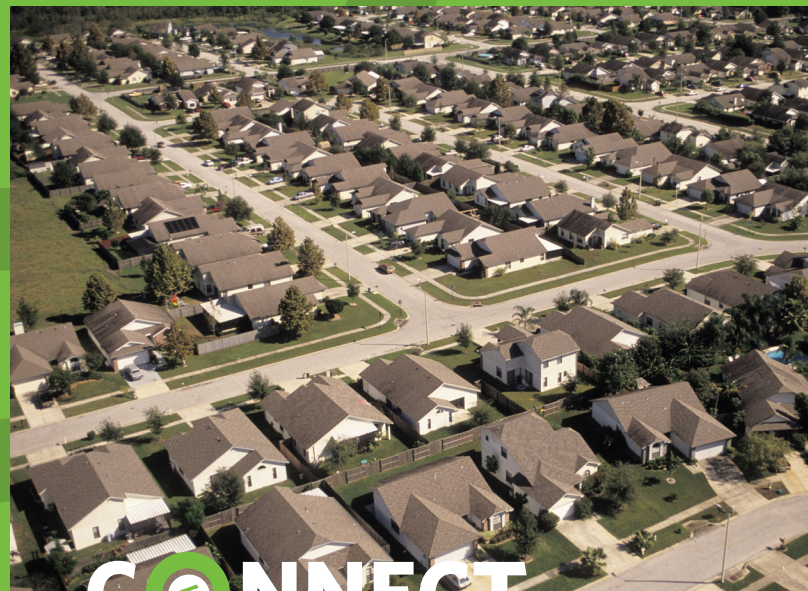
BC Housing directly manages 256 affordable housing units in Prince George. Some space in those buildings is set aside for housing readiness programs and allows non-profit organizations to move their clients into more independent living situations while still maintaining close connections and providing 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 and faces a 4.2% vacancy rate in 2016. 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'."



Housing starts have seen an overall increase of 126.8% since 2000. Fluctuations throughout that time reflect the state of the economy. The year 2016 represents one of the highest numbers of housing starts with 313 starts. Two-thirds of our housing stock is single detached homes, and only 13% are apartments. Although the majority of homes are at least 35 years old, they are generally in good condition. With 70% of houses featuring at least three bedrooms, homes in Prince George are larger than the provincial average.



# CONNECT THE DOTS

**In connecting the dots between housing and our community's development in general, we improve our understanding of community needs.**

1. Are we meeting the needs/expectations of people in their 20s and 30s? If not, why?
2. Are we meeting the needs/expectations of new immigrants? If not, why?
3. Are we attractive to new businesses and incoming workers? If not, why?
4. How should we invest to ensure that we are ready for a diverse and changing population?

# SUMMARY

This Vital Signs report 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.





# VitalSigns®

Community foundations taking the pulse of Canadian communities.



PRINCE GEORGE  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION  
all for our community.



# ENDNOTES

- 1 Markey, S., G. Halseth, and D. Manson. 2012. Investing in Place: Economic Renewal in Northern British Columbia. UBC Press: Vancouver, BC.
- 2 Statistics Canada. 1981-2006. Census Profile Prince George.  
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- 5 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.  
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For more information on food security and program suggestions, see for example: <https://foodsecurecanada.org/>, <http://beyondthemarket.ca/>, <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/keeping-bc-healthy-safe/food-safety>



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

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

Two Rivers Seniors Lodge <http://www.tworiversseniorslodge.com/#/home>

Rodica Senior Home Care House <https://www.pearlschoice.com/senior-living/BC/PrinceGeorge/rodica-senior-home-care-house?cares=>

*Non-Profit, Affordable Seniors Housing*

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

Aboriginal Housing Society Prince George <http://ahspg.ca/>

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

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**Prince George Community Foundation**

770 Brunswick Street

Prince George, BC V2L 2C2

Phone: 250-562-7772

Email: [pgfoundation@telus.net](mailto:pgfoundation@telus.net)



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