

# 2016 Census of Canada

## Language Characteristics of Albertans

### Introduction

Language is the fourth release from the census of Canada taken on May 10, 2016. This release explores language characteristics of the Canadian population—mother tongue, knowledge of official languages, languages most often spoken at home and other home languages. In Alberta, the majority of people speak English but immigrant languages, especially those from Asian countries, are becoming increasingly common. In addition, Aboriginal languages are increasingly being used in households.

### Mother Tongue

Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home as a child and still understood by the person at the time of the census. The vast majority of the Alberta population<sup>1</sup> (about 3,935,000 or 97.7%) reported a single mother tongue in 2016, with about 92,000 (2.3%) indicating they learned more than one language during childhood. Of the persons with multiple mother tongues, 84.2% involved English and a non-official language as dual mother tongues. Albertans provided over 180 languages or dialects in response to the mother tongue question, which reflects the growing diversity in the province.

### English was the mother tongue of about three-quarters of Albertans

The 2016 census found that around 3 million Albertans (76.0%) identified English as their sole mother tongue, a drop from 77.0% in 2011. About 72,000 Albertans (1.8%) identified French as their sole mother tongue, a slight decrease from 1.9% in 2011. Although French is not a common mother tongue in Alberta as a whole, it does have significant presence in some Alberta communities (with populations over 5,000). In the town of St. Paul, 12.1% identified French as a mother tongue, either alone or along with another language. Other communities with a significant francophone population include: the municipal district of St. Paul (11.9%), Cold Lake (7.2%), Bonnyville (6.9%) and the municipal district of Bonnyville (6.7%). At the national level, 57.3% of the Canadian population

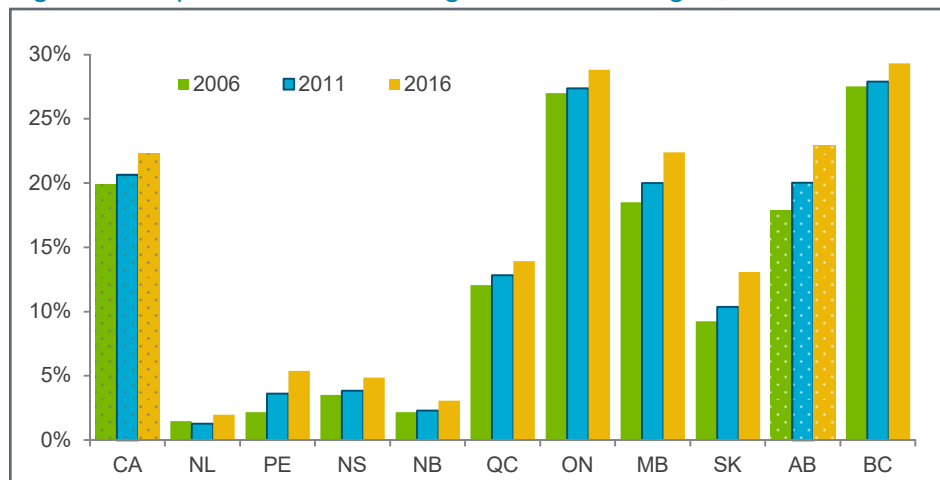
recorded English as their sole mother tongue, while 21.1% reported a single mother tongue of French.

### Immigrant mother tongues continue to increase

Alberta's linguistic diversity has increased at a faster rate compared to Canada over the last five years with the settlement of large numbers of immigrants.

In 2016, 22.3% of Canadians reported an immigrant<sup>2</sup> mother tongue (including single and multiple responses), up from 20.6% in 2011. For the first time, Alberta has a slightly higher proportion of people with an immigrant mother tongue than Canada, at 23.0%. This was 2.9 percentage points higher than in 2011 (Figure 1), and 2.2 percentage points higher than in 2006. Furthermore, this increase was larger than any other province. The next closest province was Saskatchewan, who saw a 2.7 percentage point increase in proportion between 2011 and 2016.

Figure 1: Proportion with an Immigrant Mother Tongue, CA & Provinces



### Comparability of Concepts

The 2016 language questions are largely comparable with the 2011 census. The same four questions were asked of the entire population. Two changes should be noted. First, changes in question ordering appears to have led to an increase in the reporting of multiple languages spoken. Secondly, prompts were introduced into the electronic questionnaire, which led to more precise answers compared to previous censuses. Thus, when comparing this data with past data, broader family groups of languages should be used.

For more information, please see: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm>

**Largest census divisions see fastest growth in immigrant mother tongue**

The increase in population with an immigrant<sup>2</sup> mother tongue varies greatly depending on geographic location (Map 1). In general, less populous census divisions (CDs) saw smaller increases. CD 4 (Hanna) and CD 9 (Rocky Mountain House) were the only regions to see declines in immigrant mother tongue, a drop of -17.8% and -7.7%, respectively from 2011. In contrast, more populous CDs, which tend to draw the most immigration, saw the largest increases in people with an immigrant mother tongue. CD 19 (Grande Prairie) had the largest increase at 34.3%, followed by CD 8 (Red Deer) (34.1%) and CD 11 (Edmonton) (30.9%). The increase in CD 16 should be interpreted with caution<sup>3</sup>.

**Tagalog is the most common non-English mother tongue**

Of the non-English mother tongues in Alberta in 2016, Tagalog was the most common (single response) with about 99,000 speakers (Figure 2). The next closest was German at about 80,000, followed by French with 72,000. Tagalog is also the most rapidly growing mother tongue, showing an increase of 65.0% since the last census. Alberta was home to 23.0% of Canada’s native Tagalog speakers (single response). Persian and Arabic showed the next highest growth at 45.4% and 44.8% respectively. While German and French still hold top spots in absolute numbers, their populations have not changed much, with growth rates of -1.1% and 5.3%, respectively. It should be noted that the large increase in Mandarin and Cantonese is largely due to the addition of prompts in the questionnaire, which facilitated precise responses, reducing the number of respondents in the Chinese not otherwise specified category.

**Knowledge of Official Languages**

**Almost all Albertans know at least one official language**

About 98.5% of Albertans reported the ability to converse in at least one of Canada’s official languages. Almost 3.7 million (91.9%) reported knowing English only, while 6.6% knew both English and French and very few (0.1%) knew only French. This pattern has been quite stable over time. Of people in Canada without knowledge of an official language, 9.1% resided in Alberta. While this is much lower than the proportions in Ontario (50.4%) and BC (23.7%), Alberta’s share increased by 0.8 percentage points since the last census—the largest increase among the provinces.

**Allophones without official language knowledge on the rise**

Allophones are people whose mother tongue is neither French nor English. In 2016, 6.6% of allophones in Alberta reported that they could not converse in either of the two official languages, slightly less than in the 2011 census (6.9%). Between 2011 and 2016, the number of people in Alberta who had a non-official language as a sole mother tongue and could not converse in an official language increased by 19.7% to almost 58,000, making up 1.4% of the total population. Furthermore, allophones without official language knowledge were concentrated in the older and younger ages, with 26.3% being under 15 and 34.7% being 65 or older.

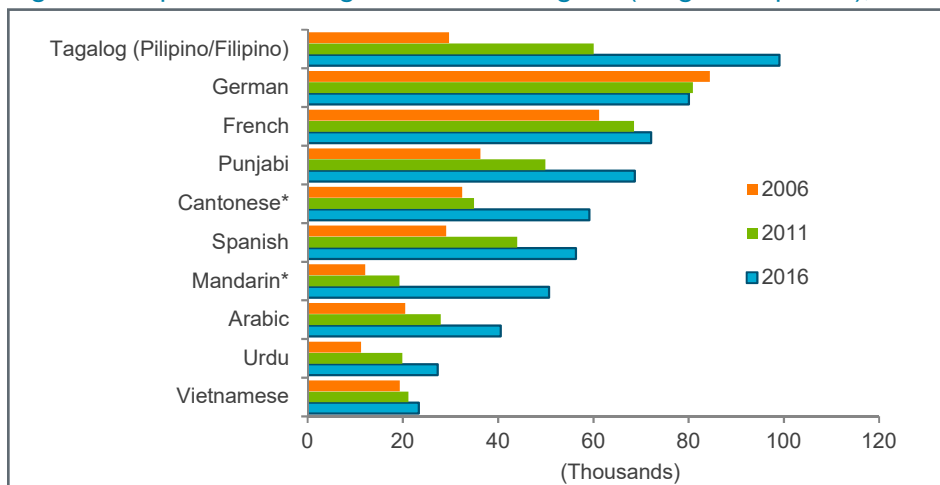
**Knowledge of official languages varies by mother tongue**

People with different mother tongues had varying knowledge about official languages. In general, people with Asian languages as a sole mother tongue were less likely to speak English or French, which reflects the fact that recent waves of immigration have increasingly come from Asian countries. Of those who listed Cantonese as a sole mother tongue, 18.3% had no official language knowledge—the highest of all mother tongues—followed by Vietnamese (14.5%) and Punjabi (14.0%). In contrast, only 0.3% of those with Dutch as a mother tongue could not converse in one of the official languages, which reflects the fact that older waves of immigration primarily came from Europe.

**Allophones without official language ability concentrated in metro areas**

Allophones who could not converse in either of the official language were concentrated in Alberta’s largest census metropolitan areas (CMAs), with Calgary home to over 29,000 and Edmonton home to over 20,000 (Table 1). This amounts to growth rates of 16.0% and 25.3% since

Figure 2: Top Ten Non-English Mother Tongues (Single Response), AB



\* The large increase in Mandarin and Cantonese is largely due to the use of electronic prompts, which greatly reduced the number of responses in the Chinese not otherwise specified category

2011, respectively. Calgary CMA was home to a disproportionate share, with 51.0% of Alberta’s total allophone population who could not converse in either of the official languages. Other areas that showed significant growth of allophones without official language knowledge were Lethbridge and Red Deer, which grew by 48.3% and 55.7%, respectively.

**Home Languages**

Home language refers to the language spoken most often (or on a regular basis) at home at the time of the census. Alberta is becoming more diverse and the wide variety of languages spoken in homes is a testament to this trend.

**Almost all Albertans spoke only one language most often at home**

As with mother tongue, the vast majority (95.3%) of Albertans listed that only one language was spoken most often at home, which was very close to the Canadian figure of 95.2%. Among those who listed more than one language, about 178,000 (94.2%) spoke both English and a non-official language in their home—a 72.9% increase since the last census.

**English as a sole home language on the decline**

In 2016, 82.6% of Albertans stated that English was the only language spoken most often at home. This was a 3.1 percentage point decrease from the 2011 census—the largest decrease among the provinces. This change is largely due to the growth of non-official languages. In 2016, 12.0% of Albertans had a sole language other than English or French spoken most often at home compared to about one in ten in 2011.

**Tagalog is the most common home language after English**

Over a quarter of Canadians who listed Tagalog as a sole home language resided in Alberta. This amounts to 55,100, or 1.4% of

respondents in Alberta (Figure 3). Furthermore, Tagalog as a sole home language has seen the largest growth, increasing by 66.0% since the last census. The next most common sole home languages among Albertans were Punjabi (1.3%) and Cantonese (1.0%).

**Aboriginal<sup>4</sup> Languages**

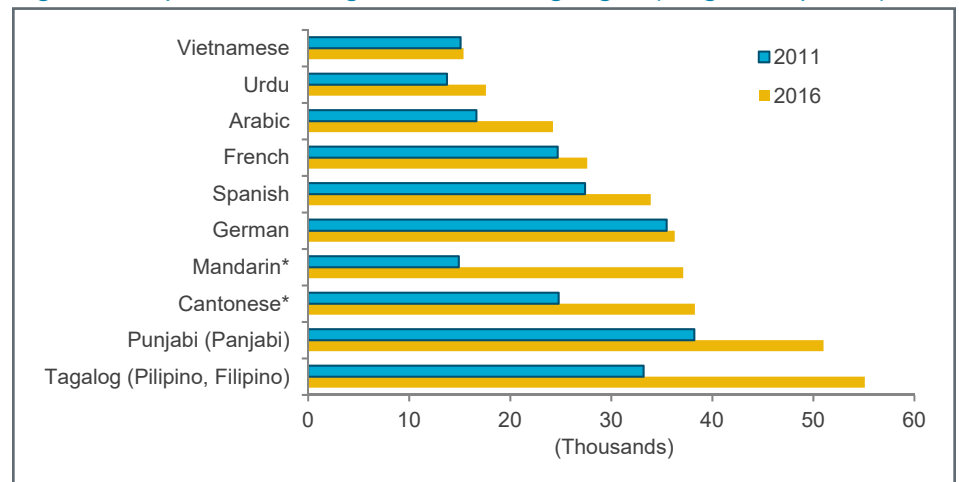
**Cree-Montagnais languages the most common Aboriginal mother tongue**

Overall, the number of people listing an Aboriginal language as a mother tongue decreased by 3.2% to about 27,200 people since 2011. Cree-Montagnais languages were the most common mother tongue for around 17,000 people. Nationally, of those who listed Cree-Montagnais languages as

**Table 1: Number of Allophones With No Official Language Knowledge**

		2016	2011	2006
Medicine Hat	CA	395	390	240
Lethbridge	CMA	1120	755	510
Brooks	CA	445	340	290
Okotoks	CA	45	25	0
High River	CA	50	65	-
Calgary	CMA	29485	25415	20300
Strathmore	CA	30	15	-
Canmore	CA	35	25	30
Red Deer	CA	755	485	375
Sylvan Lake	CA	5	5	-
Lacombe	CA	45	25	-
Camrose	CA	30	30	0
Edmonton	CMA	20120	16060	14000
Lloydminster	CA	65	30	15
Cold Lake	CA	25	15	0
Grande Prairie	CA	225	155	180
Wood Buffalo <sup>3</sup>	CA	595	365	165
Wetaskwin	CA	30	25	0

**Figure 3: Top Ten Non-English Home Languages (Single Response), AB**



\* The large increase in Mandarin and Cantonese is largely due to the use of electronic prompts, which greatly reduced the number of responses in the Chinese not otherwise specified category

their mother tongue, 17.8% resided in Alberta. Blackfoot was the second most common mother tongue and 97.7% of people in Canada with Blackfoot as a mother tongue resided in Alberta.

### Aboriginal language use at home remains strong

While the total number of people listing an Aboriginal mother tongue has decreased, Aboriginal languages have been increasingly spoken at home compared to 2011. The number of people who reported speaking an Aboriginal language at home, either most often or regularly, grew to about 31,000 persons. This is more than the number of people who reported an Aboriginal mother tongue, indicating that Aboriginal languages are being learned as an additional language. Cree-Montagnais languages were the most commonly listed home language, with over 19,000 people (Figure 4) speaking it regularly or most often at home.

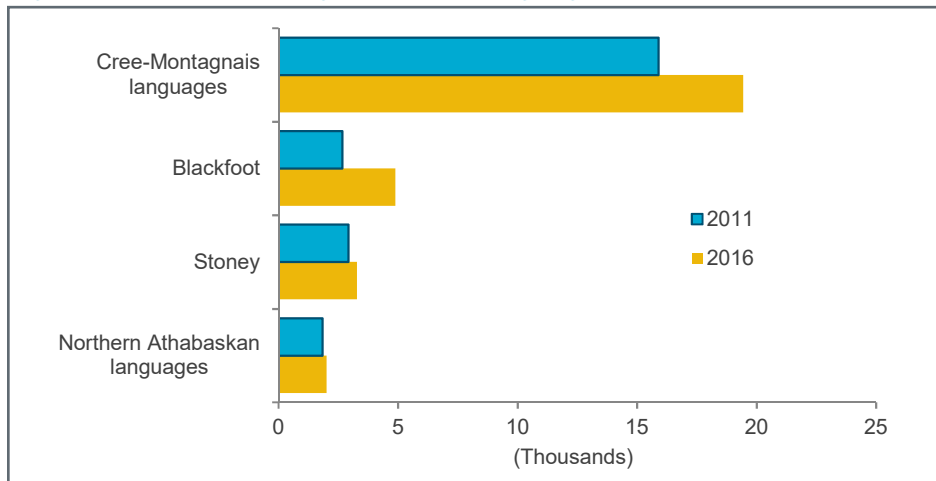
### Upcoming 2017 Census of Population Releases

September 13, 2017  
Income

October 25, 2017  
Immigration and ethnocultural diversity; Housing; Aboriginal peoples

November 29, 2017  
Education, Labour, Journey to work, Language of work, Mobility and migration

Figure 4: Top Four Aboriginal Home Languages (Total Responses), AB



1. 'Population' in this highlight refers to the non-institutional population i.e. excludes people living in an institutional collective dwelling, like a hospital, nursing home or a jail. All data in this publication is from the Censuses of Canada, conducted by Statistics Canada.
2. Immigrant languages consist of unofficial languages, excluding aboriginal and sign languages.
3. Following the Fort McMurray wildfires, Statistics Canada took steps to make sure residents of Wood Buffalo were included in the 2016 Census. Many residents responded over the usual collection period. Statistics Canada returned to Wood Buffalo in August 2016 to follow up with households that had not yet responded. If direct responses could not be obtained, administrative data was used. In these cases, the language information a household provided for the 2011 Census were used for 2016. Comparing the language variables for 2011 and 2016 for Wood Buffalo must be done with caution. For more information see: <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/app-ann1-4-eng.cfm>
4. The term Aboriginal is used here instead of Indigenous in order to be consistent with Statistics Canada's terminology used in the 2016 Census.

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Map 1: Growth of Immigrant Mother Tongues (Combined Responses) (2011-2016), Census Divisions

