



Acting local: Aging in Canada

Adapting to the aging population will look different in Lethbridge, Alberta than in Chatham-Kent, Ontario

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The recent release of Census 2011 data uncovered some firsts with regards to Canada's aging population.

For the very first time the number of people in Canada getting ready to leave the workforce outnumbered the people getting ready to start their careers. Census 2011 also shows that nationally, the two fastest growing age groups are Canadians between the ages of 60 and 64 and over 100. (Centenarians grew by about 25 percent since 2006.)¹

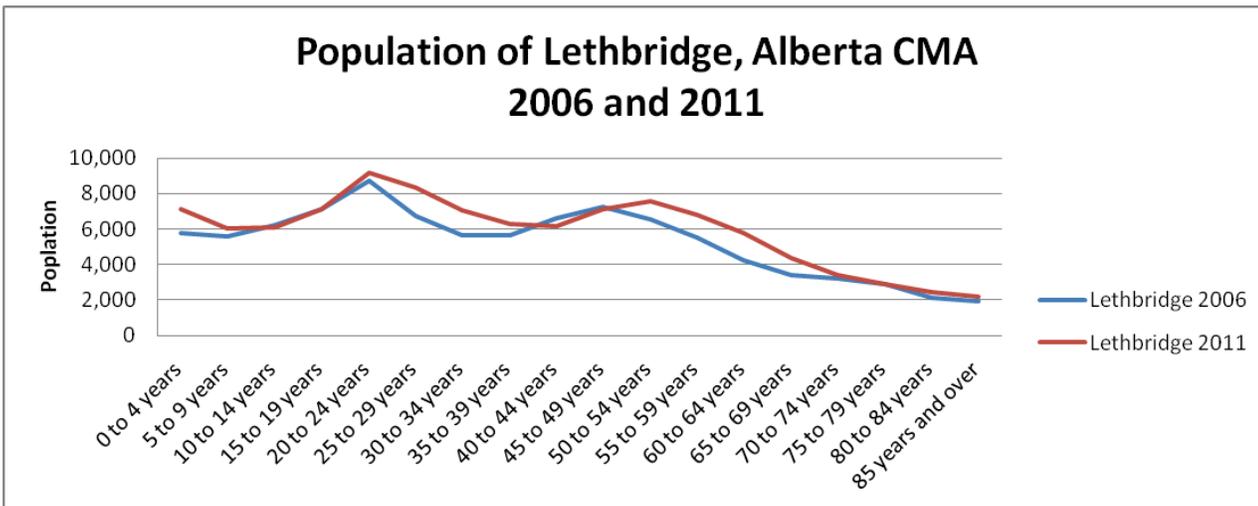
We know Canada's population is aging. We need to grapple with this reality federally and provincially. But more importantly, aging affects local communities. Municipalities will need to adapt and some will have an easier time than others. Lethbridge, Alberta is on the list of fastest growing municipalities in Canada, where Chatham-Kent, Ontario is on the list of the slowest growing.² As a result, Lethbridge will be in a better position to help seniors as they age.

Lethbridge, Alberta

Lethbridge is located just over 200 kilometres south of Calgary. It is not considered to be part of the boom associated with the oil sands.

In 2011, the population of Lethbridge was 105,999, an 11.3 percent increase from 2006.³

Since 2006, Lethbridge's younger population has seen an increase in children below nine as well as increases in the age groups of working folks, most markedly the 20 to 39 age group as well as 50 to 54.⁴



Source: Statistics Canada Census Profiles, 2011

With this growth, Lethbridge will have enough local workers to replace those who retire in a few years. They will also have a stronger tax base in future years, provided these young people stick around.

Lethbridge’s economy is centred around five core industries: Agri-food, aviation and aerospace, environmental products and services, information and communications technology, manufacturing and supply chain and logistics.⁵

The local economy is growing. Economic Development Lethbridge notes that “the number of major employers in Lethbridge has increased by 17 percent year-over-year from the forty-one reported in 2010. Overall, the number of people who are employed by these organizations has also risen by 13 percent year-over-year.”⁶ The number of registered businesses in Lethbridge has been on a continuous growth trajectory for a decade.⁷

Still, communities in and around Lethbridge will have to deal with an expanding number of retirees and individuals of old age as they require new living arrangements. This aging expansion will stress resources in caring for seniors: Things like more long-term care beds so that seniors can continue to live in their own community as long as possible.

Local support for seniors living at home may be a growth opportunity for the business and volunteer sectors alike—housecleaning, lawn care, and home maintenance are but a few examples.

Just as pressing for Lethbridge in the immediate future will be the need for jobs for their younger population to ensure they don’t leave for other opportunities elsewhere. If these younger citizens choose to stay and establish families, they will continue to sustain Lethbridge’s economy for years to come.

If they do not, the demographic situation will be increasingly weighted toward seniors. If the local workforce shrinks, local costs of demographic aging will come to bear in the context of decreased tax revenue.

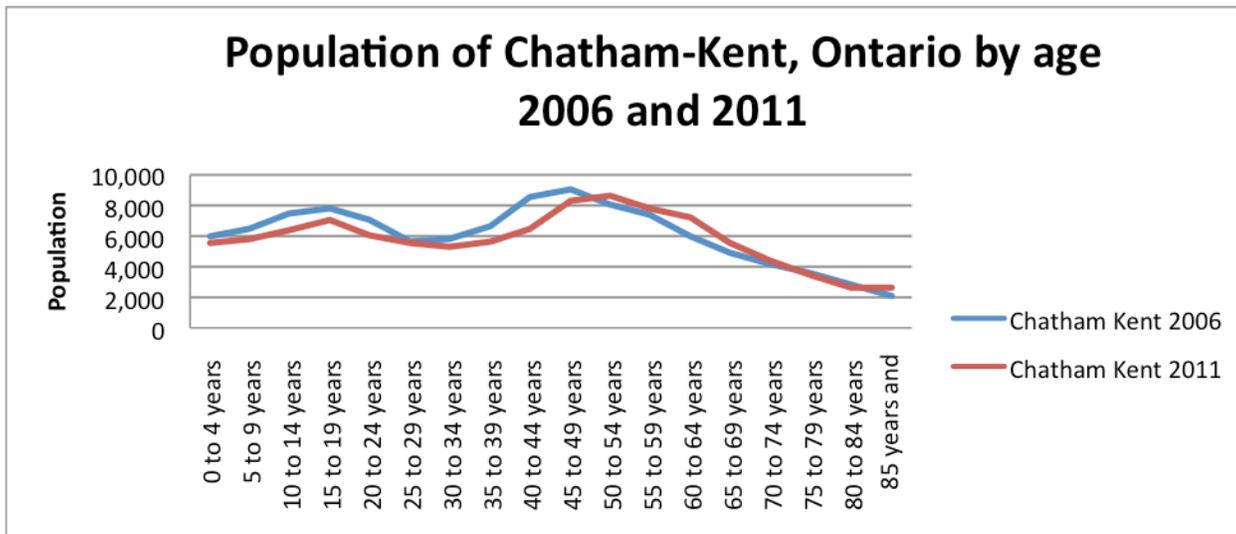
This is already the current reality in Chatham-Kent, Ontario.

Chatham-Kent, Ontario

Chatham-Kent is located in southwestern Ontario, roughly 110 kilometres west of London, Ontario and 80 kilometres east of Windsor.

In 2011, Chatham-Kent's population is comparable to Lethbridge's at 104,075. However, while Lethbridge's population is increasing, Chatham-Kent's is shrinking (down 4.2 per cent from 2006).⁸

Since 2006 in Chatham-Kent the population in all age groups *except those* aged 50-74 and 85 and over has decreased. This means that the aging process is more pronounced in Chatham-Kent than it is in Lethbridge.



Source: Statistics Canada Census Profiles 2011

As stated above, Statistics Canada found in the 2011 Census that there are more Canadians preparing for retirement than there are Canadians preparing to enter the workforce.⁹ Chatham-Kent will experience the reality of more people leaving the work force than entering within the next 10 years as Boomers retire. A shrinking workforce means that the communities in Chatham-Kent will have less tax revenue to pay for the costs of an aging population. It will also result in higher taxes born by individual workers and their families in order to sustain local government and services.

Chatham-Kent has been hurt by the loss of several major manufacturers over the last two decades. New job opportunities have tended toward lower paying jobs than those that were lost, such as call centres.¹⁰

Agriculture is another cornerstone of the Chatham-Kent economy. "In 2007, the 2,196 farms in Chatham-Kent grossed over \$406 million."¹¹ The farming sector is varied, but dominated by grain and oil-seed production.¹² Chatham-Kent is also home to GreenField Ethanol, which the municipality describes as "the largest supplier of ethanol, industrial fuel, and beverage grade alcohols in Canada."¹³

To address its population needs, the municipality seems to be aware of the need for younger families, prominently featuring a section on their website dedicated to encouraging people to move there.¹⁴ The website shares stories of people from around the world who have chosen to settle in Chatham-Kent. Highlighted are the benefits of living in small communities where commuting time is short, resources such as hospitals and schools are close at hand and living costs (including real estate) are reasonably priced.

Is this effort working? The overall population decline from 2006 to 2011 says it's not. There is no simple answer to solving the problem of population growth.

Chatham-Kent must also work to prepare for the influx of Baby Boomer seniors into residential care homes in the next 20 years. The opportunity exists for private businesses to provide such services so that people can age in their own community. Given the low cost of establishing a presence in the area, other opportunities related to healthcare of seniors, as well as services to allow seniors to age at home, are definite areas of possible growth.

Local long-term care costs will be paid by private business and provincial government alike. Changes to allow for accessibility must be covered by the organization or business making them, and changes to sidewalks and streetscape will be paid for by citizens through their municipal taxes.

Right now, new retirement and nursing homes will be a greater priority than new schools in Chatham-Kent, given the fact that the first Baby Boomers will be 85 in 20 years. Currently, the municipality is well served by long-term care homes throughout its borders and has a well-rounded directory of services for seniors in need of assisted living.¹⁵ It appears that the community is aware of the needs of their seniors, but further expansion of services will likely be necessary as the Baby Boomers grow into old age. This generation will also change the nature of living in a retirement facility, as their lifestyle has been and will continue to be markedly different from that of their parents and grandparents.¹⁶

How will we care for our seniors?

In Lethbridge, the Baby Boomer's retirement will occur within the context of growing economy and population. In Chatham-Kent, the population is declining and the aging process is farther ahead and therefore the needs are more pressing. The time to be concerned about caring for seniors in Chatham-Kent is now, whereas Lethbridge has some additional time to prepare.

Both cities will need local services. Especially for seniors living in more rural locales, access to medical services must be maintained across distances. Local entrepreneurs should seriously consider establishing service businesses targeted towards an aging population.

Such services, combined with existing and future volunteer programs will be increasingly important as families have fewer children. We know from Statistics Canada that "the average number of children per family decreased from 2.7 in 1961 to 1.9 in 2011."¹⁷ Those who find themselves childless in old age will have to rely on extended family, community and government services instead. Only children have a hard task too: They may find they need to rely on government and community services when they cannot carry the load of care. This will create a further stress on government finances. Local resources such as lawn cutting, house cleaning or Meals on Wheels will become more important to allow seniors to age in place at home.

Caring for a growing senior population requires a robust younger population and plentiful municipal funds, paid by taxpayers. In this respect, Lethbridge is far ahead of Chatham-Kent.

Recommendations

- Local government should examine its built environment (sidewalks, government buildings, etc) for ways to improve physical accessibility in the community, to town buildings and government services
- Local government should examine the population structure of their community and determine whether more long-term care facilities need to be planned
- Families should be prepared for extra responsibilities of care as seniors age and make efforts to familiarize themselves with all available local services

Endnotes

¹ Martel, L. and Ménard, F.P. (2012). The Canadian population in 2011: Age and sex. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-311-x/98-311-x2011001-eng.cfm>

² For highest population growth areas, see <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/2011001/tbl/tbl3-eng.cfm>

For lowest population growth areas, see <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/2011001/tbl/tbl4-eng.cfm>

See Statistics Canada. (2012). Census metropolitan area (CMA) and census agglomeration (CA) in the census dictionary for definitions. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2011/ref/dict/geo009-eng.cfm>

³ Statistics Canada. (2012). Census Profiles 2011, for Chatham-Kent CMA and Lethbridge, AB CMA. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CMA&Code1=556&Geo2=CMA&Code2=810&Data=Count&SearchText=Chatham-Kent&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=556&TABID=1>

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Economic Development Lethbridge. (2012). Key industries and sectors. Retrieved from http://www.chooselethbridge.ca/business/key_industry.php

⁶ Economic Development Lethbridge. (2012). Major employers. Retrieved from <http://www.chooselethbridge.ca/business/employers.php>

⁷ *Ibid.* See Figure D.35.a

⁸ See endnote 3

⁹ Martel, L. and Ménard, F.P. (2012). The Canadian population in 2011: Age and sex.

¹⁰ Municipality of Chatham-Kent. (2012). Economic development: Business process outsourcing. Retrieved from <http://www.chatham-kent.ca/EconomicDevelopment/KeyIndustriesandSectors/Pages/businessprocessoutsourcing.aspx>

¹¹ Municipality of Chatham-Kent. (2012). Economic development: Agriculture. Retrieved from <http://www.chatham-kent.ca/EconomicDevelopment/KeyIndustriesandSectors/Pages/agriculture.aspx>

¹² Municipality of Chatham-Kent. (2012). Economic development: Agriculture. See Agricultural production, farms by industry, 2006 census. Retrieved from <http://www.chatham-kent.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Business/Economic%20Development/Key%20Industries%20and%20Sectors/AgriculturalProduction.pdf>

¹³ Municipality of Chatham-Kent. (2012). Economic development: Agriculture.

¹⁴ Municipality of Chatham-Kent. (2012). Welcome newcomers. Retrieved from <http://www.chatham-kent.ca/Newcomers/Pages/Home.aspx>

¹⁵ Senior advisory committee of Chatham-Kent. (2012). Assisted living. Retrieved from <http://ckseniors.ca/assisted-living/>

¹⁶ For a discussion of this reality in the City of Ottawa, read Miedema, D. (2009). Getting ready for the boom. Ottawa: Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.imfcanada.org/issues/getting-ready-boom>

¹⁷ Milan, A. and Bohnert, N. (2012). Fifty years of families in Canada: 1961 to 2011. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/98-312-x2011003_1-eng.cfm#n2