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Special Report

Adding up: Alberta's population growth and its economic implications

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Demographically speaking, something very interesting has been happening in Alberta over the last few years. Total population growth spiked, net interprovincial migration turned strongly positive, and there was a huge influx of immigrants and non-permanent residents.

Things have "calmed down" with growth easing off, but the recent population boom and what happens next remain a critical part of Alberta's economic story.

With that in mind, this report provides answers to five key questions regarding Alberta's demographic trajectory:

1. How much recent growth has there been and how does this compare to other places?
2. What was the source of the growth?
3. Where in Alberta did it occur?
4. What's next?
5. What are the main economic implications?

1. Setting the pace - Alberta has been Canada's population star

After several years of relatively weak annual growth rates*, Alberta outpaced every other province and territory on both 2023 and 2024. Alberta's population grew by 4.4% last year—its fastest pace since 1981—versus 3.0% nationally.

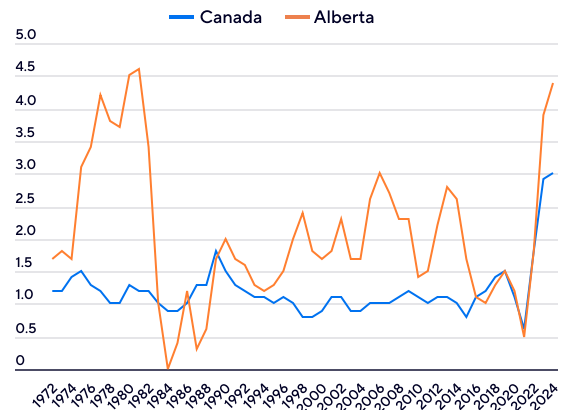
Alberta also grew faster than all 50 U.S. states last year with the U.S. leader (Florida) well back at 2.0% annual growth.

Over 24 months, Alberta added just shy of 378,000 new residents to reach a total population of almost 4.9 million on July 1, 2024. According to Statistics Canada's real-time population clock, Alberta hit [the 5-million mark](#) on May 11.

**By convention, annual population is measured as of July 1 of each year.*

Population growth

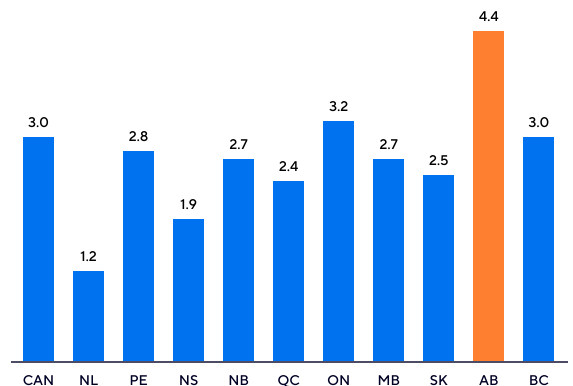
Annual % change, as of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0005-01 and ATB Economics

Population growth in Canada, 2024

Annual % change, as of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0005-01 and ATB Economics

At 204,000 new residents, 2024 saw the largest absolute increase in Alberta's population on record, beating the previous high set in 2013 by almost 100,000. The growth was equivalent to adding twice the population of the Red Deer metro area in just 12 months. In the U.S., only Florida, California, and Texas added more people last year.

However you slice it, Alberta's recent population growth has been red hot.

2. A popular place - Migration has been key to Alberta's population growth

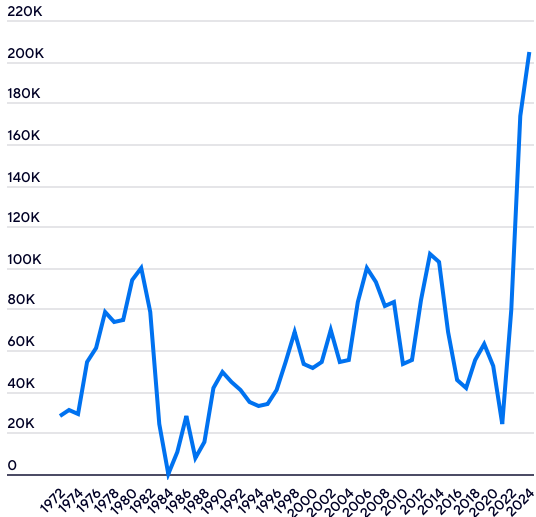
An international affair

Net international migration* has been the largest contributor to Alberta's recent population growth for the last nine years, accounting for 71% of the 204,000 residents added in 2024.

The annual number of immigrants arriving in Alberta hit a record high in 2024 at over 60,000 (the current data series goes back to 1972). During the decade before the pandemic, the annual inflow of immigrants averaged a little over 39,000.

Population growth in Alberta

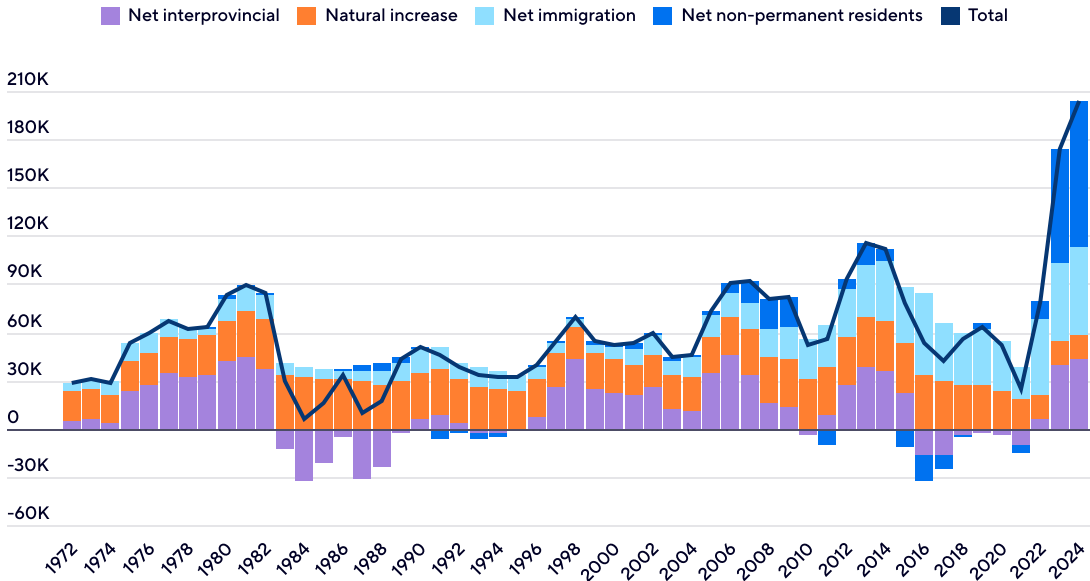
Annual change, as of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0005-01 and ATB Economics

Population growth in Alberta by source

Annual change, as of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0008-01 and ATB Economics

An even bigger story, however, has been the meteoric rise in the number of net non-permanent residents (NPRs)** added to Alberta's population. In 2023, 71,331 more NPRs came to live in Alberta than left compared to a net gain of 11,497 the year before, shattering the previous record of 19,603 set in 2009. The annual net gain in 2024 was even higher than in 2023, rising to 91,260.

As of January 1, 2025, there were 271,835 NPRs in Alberta—5.5% of the provincial population, up from 1.8% in mid-2023. Nationally, there were about 3 million NPRs at the start of 2025 with Alberta home to 9% of the Canadian total. Most NPRs in Alberta are temporary work permit holders.

Compared to just two years earlier at the start of 2023, the number of NPRs in Alberta was up by 113% compared to a 58% rise nationally.

As we will see below, federal policy changes aimed at reducing the number of NPRs in Canada were announced last year and are already eroding Alberta's population growth from this component.

**Refers to international immigrants less net international emigrants (new emigrants less returning emigrants) plus net non-permanent residents.*

***Statistics Canada defines the non-permanent resident (NPR) population as people from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada who fall into one of the following categories: 1) work and/or study permit holders, as well as the family members of those permit holders; and persons whose permits are in the process of being renewed; 2) asylum claimants, protected persons, and related groups.*

Welcome neighbour

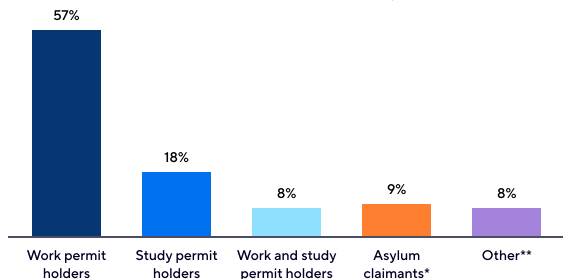
Net interprovincial migration has been the second largest source of the recent spike in new Alberta residents.

After six consecutive years of net losses to other parts of the country (2016-2021), Alberta started gaining residents again with a net increase from interprovincial migration of 5,646 in 2022. This was followed by a net increase of over 39,000 in 2023 and a near-record gain of 43,750 last year. As a result, interprovincial migration has changed from a source of population loss to accounting for about a fifth of the growth in 2024.

Alberta gained residents from all provinces last year, but Ontario was the main source at 43% of the total followed by B.C. at 28%. Of the 136,560 interprovincial migrants who moved in and out of Alberta in 2024, two-thirds moved to or from Ontario and B.C. This makes sense given that Ontario is the largest province by population and B.C. is the third largest and Alberta's physical neighbour.

Alberta's NPR population by type

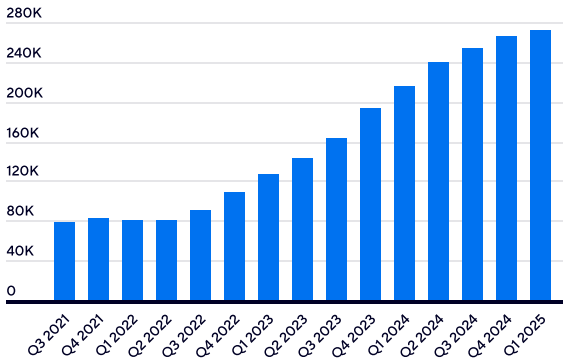
% of total NPRs (n=271,835), as of January 1, 2025



*76% of asylum claimants have a work or study permit
 **Other mainly refers to family members living with permit holders, unless these family members are already Canadian citizens, landed immigrants, or NPRs themselves.
 Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0121-01 and ATB Economics

Alberta's NPR population

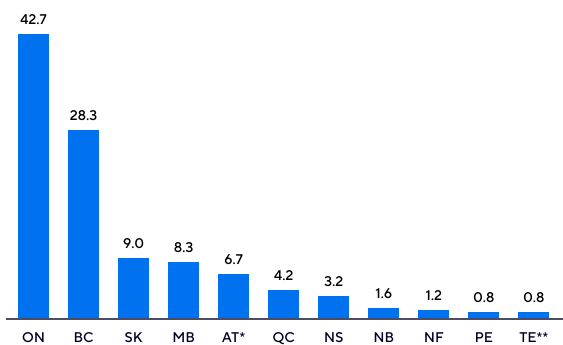
Number of NPRs



Q1 = January 1; Q2 = April 1; Q3 = July 1; Q4 = October 1
 Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0121-01 and ATB Economics

Net interprovincial migration to Alberta , 2024

% of total annual gain, period from July 1 to June 30



*Atlantic provinces **Northern territories
 Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0022-01 and ATB Economics

Language barriers are likely a key reason for the relatively small flow of residents between Quebec and Alberta. We've identified the relative affordability of housing in Alberta compared to Ontario and B.C. as a key reason for the extra strong gains* from these two provinces as residents [chase affordability](#) (more on this in section 5).

**On average, Ontario and B.C. typically account for 45% of Alberta's annual net gains from the rest of Canada, but this rose to 66% in 2023 and 71% in 2024.*

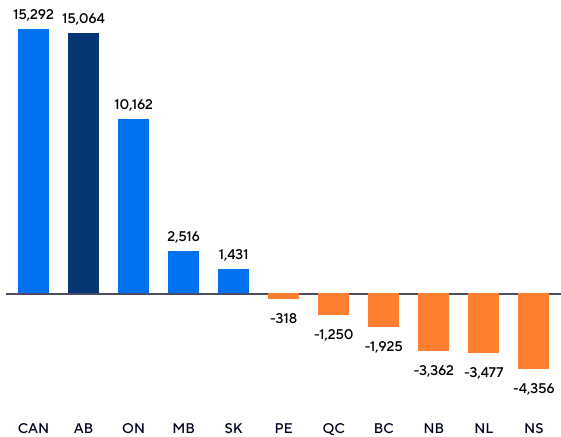
Baby steps

Unlike some provinces, Alberta continues to grow from natural increase (births less deaths), but its contribution has been declining. Natural increase added over 15,000 people to Alberta's population last year—less than half what it was ten years ago. The Atlantic provinces, Quebec and B.C. all experienced natural decrease last year.

Although its population is over three times larger than Alberta's, natural increase added fewer people to Ontario (10,162) than it did to Alberta.

Natural increase/decrease in Canada, 2024

Births less deaths, period from July 1 to June 30



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0008-01 and ATB Economics

3. Closer together - Population growth has been concentrated in larger centres

In the past, we tended to talk about “urban” and “rural” areas. While these terms can still be useful, it seems more helpful to look at people living in/near large centres versus in/near small centres. To this end, Statistics Canada provides data that allows us to divide up the province in a number of ways:

- 1) the population living in census metropolitan areas* (CMAs);
- 2) in census agglomerations** (CAs);
- 3) in municipalities with more than 5,000 residents; and
- 4) and in areas with less than 5,000 (Statistics Canada refers to these as [rural and small town areas](#)).

CMAs and CAs

The vast majority of Albertans live in or near a relatively large urban centre with over 8 in 10 Albertans residing in either a CMA (74.9%) or a CA (8.6%) in 2024. Most of Alberta's population growth has been in its large metros. Alberta's four CMAs (Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Red Deer) grew—as a group—by 25.6% between 2014 and 2024 (adding 747,260 residents) compared to 8.2% for the CAs (31,563) and just 3.7% for the areas outside the two (28,629).

Calgary posted the largest increase among Alberta's four CMAs since 2014 at 28.3% (adding 392,813 residents) while Red Deer posted the smallest at 10.8% (11,028). Canmore was the province's fastest growing CA over this period at +29% and posted the fifth highest growth rate out of Canada's 111 CAs.

**A census metropolitan area (CMA) is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centered on a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more must live in the core. To be included in the CMA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the core, as measured by commuting flows. CMAs often include “rural” areas.*

***A census agglomeration is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centered on a population centre (known as the core). A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000. To be included in the CA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the core, as measured by commuting flows. CAs often include “rural” areas.*

Population of CMAs, 2024

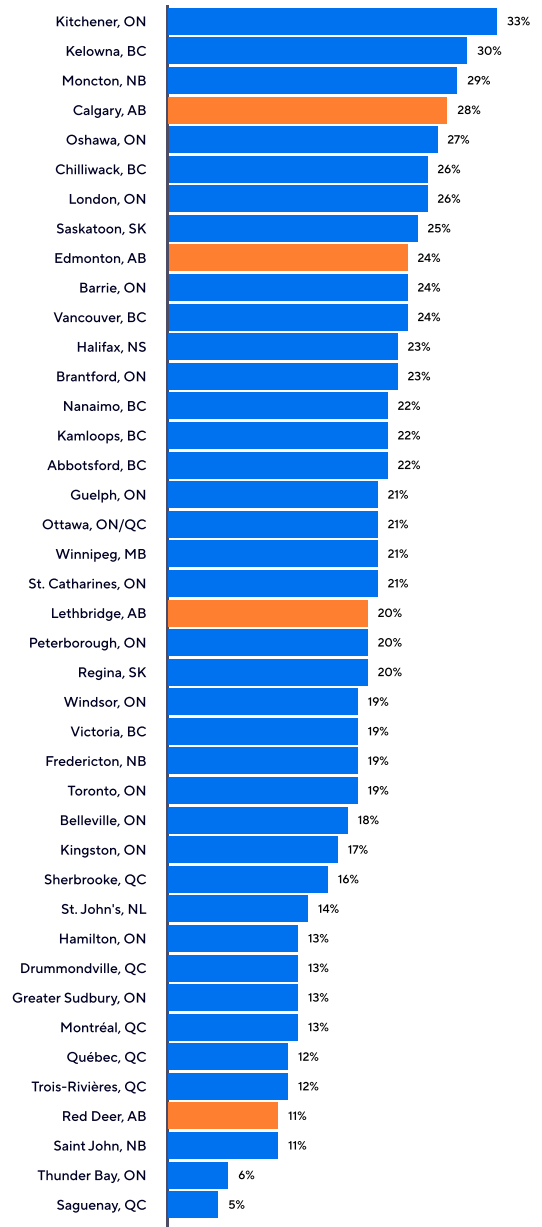
As of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0148-01 and ATB Economics

Population of CMAs

% change 2014-2024, as of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0148-01 and ATB Economics

Rural and small town areas

Dividing the province into municipalities with more than 5,000 residents and those with less than 5,000, we find that 93% of Albertans live in communities of over 5,000.

The growth rate between 2014 and 2024 was 21.4% for the larger communities (which added 802,832 residents) versus 1.4% (+4,620 residents) for the rural and small town areas. As such, while Alberta's smaller municipalities are not—as a group—getting smaller, their growth has been much more modest than in the larger centres.

It is important to note that there is a great deal of variation at the level of individual municipalities. Some illustrative examples of growth between 2014 and 2024 across municipalities of different size and inside and outside CMA/CAs:

- The Town of Cochrane (part of the Calgary CMA) grew by 67.3% to 38,014
- Strathcona County (part of the Edmonton CMA) grew by 5.4% to 105,218
- The Town of Blackfalds (near the Red Deer CMA, but not part of it) grew by 52.7% to 11,978
- The Town of Drumheller (not part of a CMA or CA) is about the same size, growing by just 0.3% to 8,410
- The Town of Valleyview (not part of a CMA or CA), shrank by 7.9% to 1,752
- The Village of Delia (not part of a CMA or CA), shrank by 29.6% to 146

4. Growing strong - Population projections

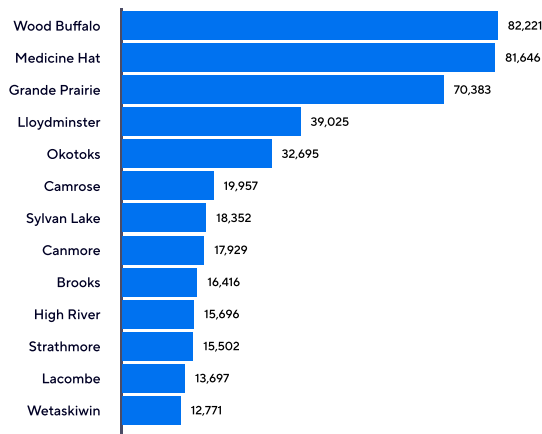
The near-term - Slower, but not slow

The red-hot population growth rates seen in 2023 and 2024 have slowed with the quarter-over-quarter (q/q) growth down to 0.6% as of Q1 2025 from the peak of 1.3% seen in Q4 2023.* Although slower, Alberta's growth rate remained the highest among the provinces, three times higher than the national average of 0.2%, and double what it was over the five-years before the pandemic.

*Q1 = as of January 1; Q2 = as of April 1; Q3 = as of July 1; as of Q4 = October 1.

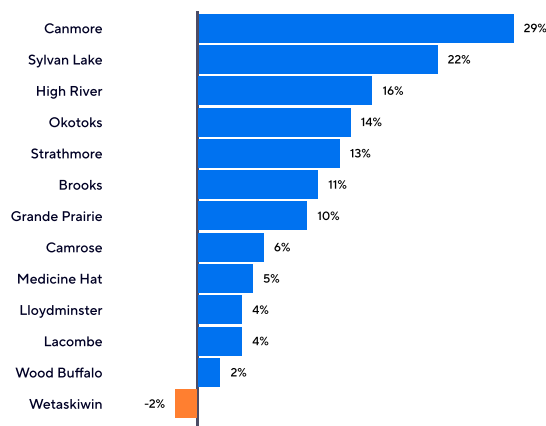
Interprovincial gains were lower over the back of half of 2024 compared to the same period in 2023 by a third, but remained relatively strong. The net gain from permanent immigration, meanwhile, was higher over the second half of the year compared to the same six months in 2023 as was the gain from natural increase. The main reason for the slower growth, therefore, is a falloff in NPRs linked to [federal government efforts](#) to curb the number of NPRs in the country.

Population of Alberta CAs, 2024 As of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0148-01 and ATB Economics

Population of Alberta CAs % change 2014-2024, as of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0148-01 and ATB Economics

With inflow of NPRs into Alberta down and the outflow up over the second half of 2024, the net gain fell from 53,236 to 18,294 (-65.6%). The falloff was more precipitous at the national level, with the gain from NPRs down by 96.0% with more NPRs leaving Canada than arriving in the fourth quarter of 2024—the first time this has happened since the end of 2021.

In keeping with these trends, our most recent economic forecast (March 2025) sees Alberta's annual population growth slowing from 4.4% last year to 2.5% in 2025 and 1.7% in 2026.

This reflects federal measures aimed at reducing the number of international students and temporary work permit holders in Canada (even if only partially met) and more modest gains from interprovincial migration as the economic growth is dampened by the trade war.

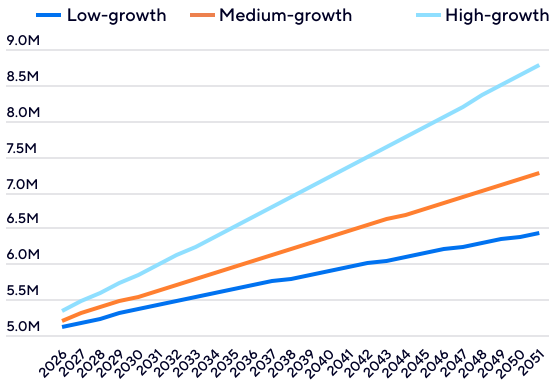
Longer-term - Population projections

Barring something unforeseen, Alberta's population is on track to continue growing for decades to come and to do so faster than the national average. According to Statistics Canada's [latest population projections](#) (January 2025), Alberta's population not only grows, but also outpaces the national average, across all ten scenarios prepared by the statistical agency.

According to [Alberta Treasury Board and Finance](#) (TBF) projections, Alberta is projected to add between 1.3 and 3.5 million people by 2051. In the medium-growth scenario, Alberta grows by about 2.1 million.*

Net immigration is projected to remain the largest source of new Albertans over the projection period, accounting for around 56% of the growth in TBF's medium-growth scenario while net NPRs account for only 1%. Natural increase is the second largest source of growth at 26% with net interprovincial migration accounting for 16%.

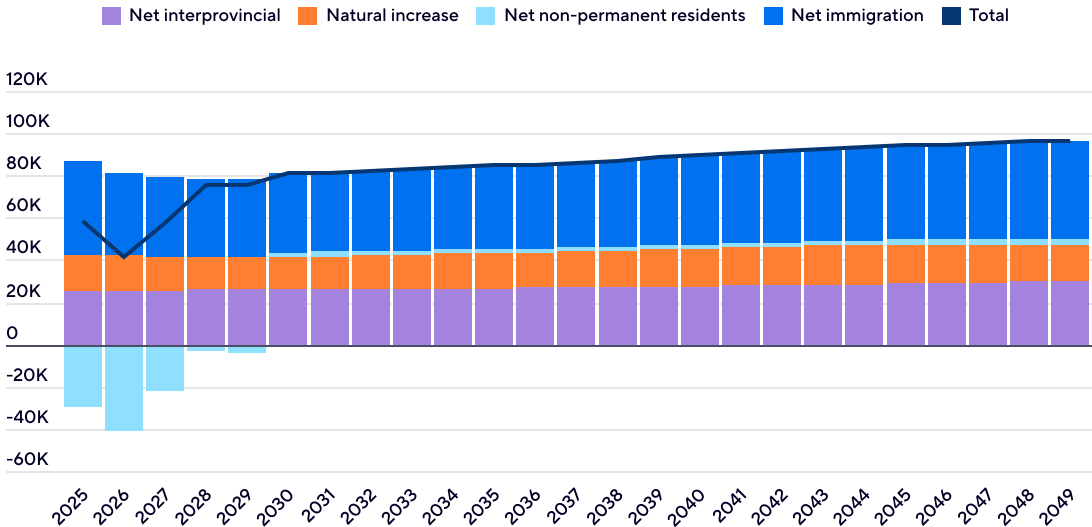
Projected population growth in Alberta
Number, as of July 1



Source: Alberta Treasury Board and Finance and ATB Economics

*There are two main long-term population projection sources for Alberta: Statistics Canada and TBF. Both sets of projections show the same general trends for Alberta. The Statistics Canada estimates allow for interprovincial comparisons; the TBF estimates allow for intraprovincial comparisons.

Projected population growth in Alberta by source
Annual change, as of July 1



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0058-01 and ATB Economics

Metro-centric

The population projections prepared by Alberta Treasury Board and Finance allow us to get a sense of which parts of the province are expected to grow the most. Based on the medium-growth scenario and the period from 2024 to 2051, 85% of the population growth will take place in the CMAs of Calgary and Edmonton. If you add in the CMAs of Red Deer and Lethbridge, it rises to 89%. That works out to about 2.1 million new residents added to Alberta's four metro areas versus about 266,000 to the rest of the province.

While most parts of the province will experience population growth, some regions—especially those outside the urban corridors—will get smaller due to natural decrease and out migration.

5. Demographics and economics

Slower, but steady

By enlarging its market, expanding its labour pool, supporting housing demand, increasing ties with other parts of the country and the world, and helping to create a sense of dynamism, Alberta's population growth has been a key driver of its economic growth and was one of the key reasons its real GDP growth outpaced the national average last year.

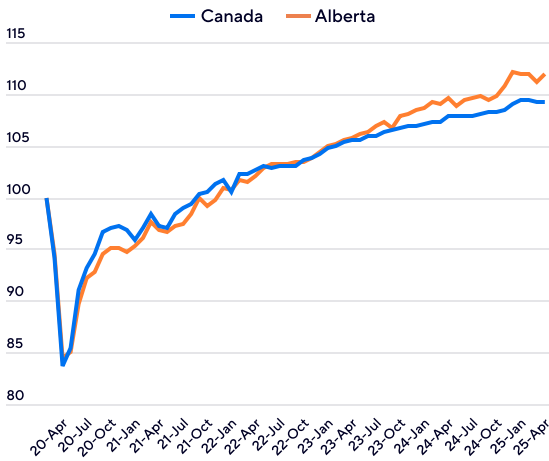
Alberta's relatively strong pace of job creation (see the chart below) has been a key factor in this, acting like a magnet keeping people in, and drawing people to, the province. Demographic and economic growth work together to form a virtuous circle: Economic growth attracts more residents to Alberta and keeps more Albertans in the province. Population growth spurs economic activity. And so on.

At the same time, the unusually rapid pace Alberta's recent population growth has also created economic and social challenges, including upward pressure on the cost of housing and rental accommodation and on the health and education system. For this reason, the relatively slower pace of population growth expected going forward is arguably more sustainable and will help grow the economy without creating undue strain in other areas.

Not cheap, but more affordable

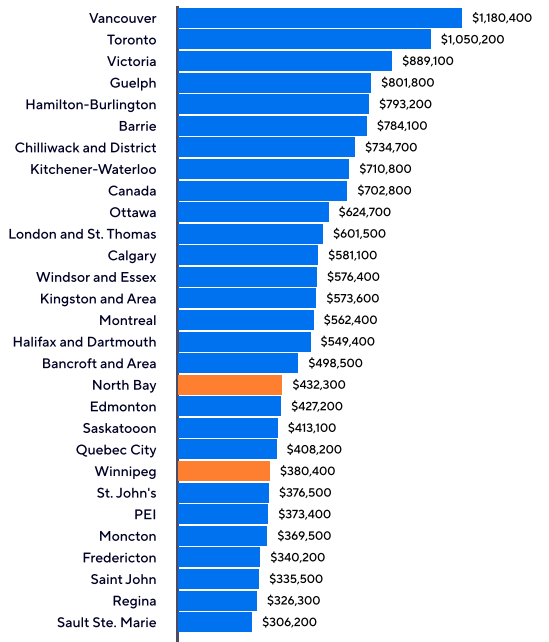
In addition to the higher level of overall economic growth and the related employment opportunities in Alberta, another factor driving the recent spike in population is the relative affordability of housing in the province. Looking at the data available for large metro markets, we find that the average price of a benchmark home* on the resale market in Calgary and Edmonton is significantly lower than in markets such as Victoria, Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa.

Monthly employment
Index, Feb 2020 = 100, seasonally adjusted



Source: Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0287-01 and ATB Economics

Composite benchmark resale home prices,
March 2025 Select markets



Benchmark prices are generated by the MLS® Home Price Index model
Source: Canadian Real Estate Association and ATB Economics

Average rent for an apartment or condo is also, while not cheap, relatively less expensive in Calgary and Edmonton than in many other Canadian cities.

The cost disparities have likely been keeping more Albertans in the province who don't like or can't afford the prices in markets like Toronto and Vancouver while also attracting more residents from those higher-priced markets as they "chase affordability." While home prices have been rising in Alberta, they remain relatively low so we expect this to continue to support strong gains from interprovincial migration.

Younger, but aging

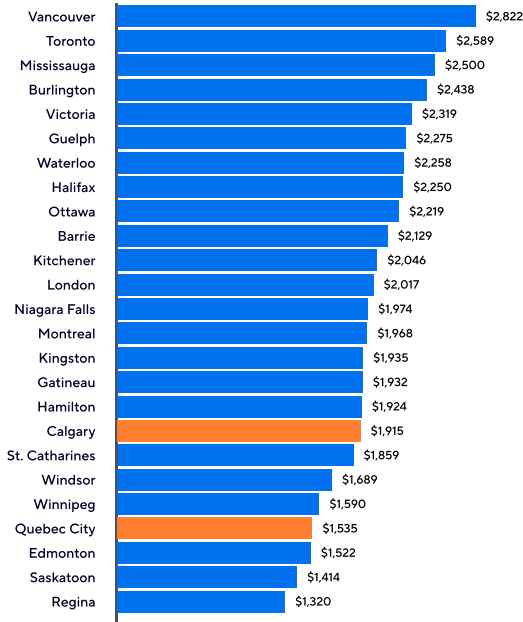
Alberta has a younger population than the other provinces with the median age sitting at 38 years compared to 40 years in the country as a whole (as of July 1, 2024). A key reason for this is Alberta's net gains from interprovincial migration as the newcomers tend to be younger than the general population.

Alberta also has a lower percentage of residents aged 65 and over (a.k.a. seniors) at 15% of its total population versus 19% nationally and a higher percentage of residents aged 14 and under (a.k.a. youth) at 18% versus 15% nationally. Putting these shares together, the ratio of "working-age" Albertans to youth and seniors was 1.8, just slightly above the national ratio of 1.7.

A higher ratio of working-age to non-working-age residents presents some advantages in terms of a larger pool of potential workers and a broader income-tax base. At the same time, a smaller percentage of seniors provides Alberta with a little extra time to adapt in positive ways to an aging population.

And aging is what Alberta's population is doing. According to Statistics Canada's medium-growth (M2) scenario, Alberta's seniors population will increase from 15% to 20% of the population by 2049. This will still be the smallest proportion among the provinces and the share of seniors in Alberta's population will not hit the **current** national average until 2035. Nonetheless, the growing number of seniors represents a

Average rent, apartments and condos March 2025



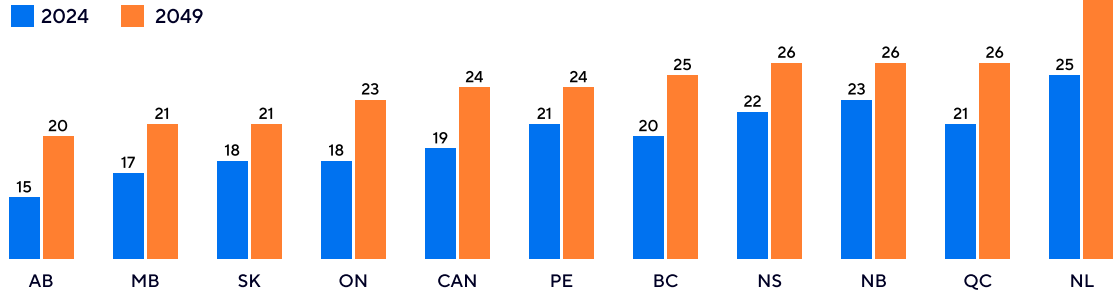
Source: Urbanation Inc., Rentals.ca Network data and ATB Economics

significant shift that requires proactive planning on the part of governments, service providers, and businesses.

It is important to note that an aging population in Alberta does not mean its pool of labour or the number of children will get smaller. While the senior cohort expands by 665,700 by 2049 in the medium-growth (M2) scenario, the working age population grows by over 1.2 million and the population under 15 increases by 207,000. Older yes, fewer kids and workers, no.

Population aging in Canada

% of the population age 65 and over, medium-growth (M2) scenario



Source: Statistics Canada Table 17-10-0057-01 and ATB Economics

Putting it all together

David Foot's observation in his book *Boom, Bust and Echo* that demographics explain about two-thirds of everything gets quoted often and for good reason. From housing demand and the composition of the labour market to volunteering rates and the size of the tax base, demographic trends have profound effects.

In Alberta's case, population growth has, for example, been expanding its internal market and labour pool while its relatively younger population means it has more time to adapt to the rising number of seniors. Rapid population growth, however, can also create challenges as housing, infrastructure and services struggle to keep up. For these and similar reasons, population trends are key to understanding Alberta's future economic performance.

Looking ahead at where the trends are pointing, Alberta is on track to add more people, but at a more reasonable pace than we've seen in recent years. The population will continue to age, but more slowly than the country as a whole. Alberta's younger age profile means that natural increase is going to keep adding people to the population and, if economic conditions and the relative affordability of housing cooperate, it will also gain residents from other parts of Canada. Most of the growth will come from other countries and almost all of it will occur in or near urban centres.

The population boom Alberta has been experiencing provided an economic boost that helped it weather the recent inflation and interest rate storm and ongoing growth will help it push through the current tariff headwinds.

As past patterns demonstrate, population growth is not guaranteed and as much as it can drive economic growth, it can also be undermined by economic factors. The availability of good jobs, a high quality of life and other opportunities will continue to be a crucial variable affecting Alberta's population growth in the years and decades ahead.

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