

Data : Social assistance beneficiaries and rates in the Canadian provinces since 1990

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The social assistance rate measures the proportion of persons aged between 0 and 64 years old who benefit from this program. Neither Statistic Canada nor a federal department gathers this information into a single document, but Ronald Kneebone and Katherine White built a database presenting the number of beneficiaries in each province from 1976 to 2012 (2014). This database is certainly useful because it includes all beneficiaries and allows interprovincial comparison. We noted, however, an inconsistency related to the use of fiscal years as time reference for some years. For the most part, Kneebone and White used point-in-time data (March 31), but for an unknown reason the authors switch to fiscal year averages in more recent years. This difference can create important distortions. A good example is Ontario in 2010 where the changing economic context created an important discrepancy within the data: on March 31, there were 830,028 beneficiaries of social assistance, but only 797,664 if the fiscal year average was used as reference. The difference for that year was over 30,000 recipients. Generally, the discrepancies are not as important, but it remains that Kneebone and White's database lacks consistency.

Hence, we built a new database covering all provinces since 1990, with March 31 as our only time reference. Beside a few exceptions (see the notes on the last page of this document), we were able to create a more consistent database. We calculated the social assistance rates with this data and with CANSIM's total population data (051-0001). Differences with Kneebone and White's rates range between 0,1% and 0,3%.

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Notes

Nova-Scotia 2004: January

Prince Edward Island 2004: February

Manitoba 2006-2014: Fiscal year average

Prince Edward Island 2009-2013: Fiscal year average

Saskatchewan 2009-2010: Fiscal year average

Saskatchewan 2011-2014: Calculated from fiscal year average social assistance rate

- 2014: Estimation