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Canadian Census Geography

Description of concepts used by Statistics Canada

Research Tip

You can keyword search all free Census data in our [Source Lists](#)

Simply use our [Census search page](#).

The following is a brief overview of the geographic units most often used in Census data dissemination.

For complete definitions, pictorial descriptions and official reference maps see the Statistics Canada web site:

[2006 Census Geography - Illustrated Glossary](#)

[Standard Geographical Classification, Reference Maps](#)

Overview

Census Geographic units can sound intimidating and appear confusing but they actually operate in a straightforward fashion. What can sometimes confuse the issue is the habit of frequent Census users to only refer to the initials of each Census geographical area as opposed to the full name or vernacular equivalent (e.g. CSD instead of "Census Subdivision" or "city/town"). Don't worry by the end of the next few paragraphs you will be able to sound just as impressive as any civil servant in Canada!

Dissemination Areas (DAs) are the primary building blocks of the Census. They are small areas composed of one or more neighbouring blocks, with a population of 400 to

700 persons. When all the DAs of a community are combined together the resulting geographic unit is called a Census Subdivision (CSD). This is a municipality or an area that is deemed to be equivalent to a municipality for statistical reporting purposes (e.g. an Indian reserve or an unorganized territory).

Census Subdivisions (CSDs) are then combined together to form a Census Division (CD). A CD is defined as a Group of neighboring municipalities joined together for the purposes of regional planning and managing common services (such as police or ambulance services). For example, a census division might correspond to a county, a regional municipality or a regional district.

Census Divisions (CDs) are then combined to form provincial totals and provincial totals are combined to form the national total.

The story as it goes so far:

CANADA > PROVINCE > CD > CSD > DA

Of course there is another wrinkle to the system. (It cannot be too simple or else everyone would understand!) Metropolitan areas across Canada are organized into Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) or Census Agglomerations (CAs). These are areas consisting of one or more adjacent municipalities (CSDs) situated around a major urban core. To form a Census Metropolitan Area, the urban core must have a population of at least 100,000. To form a Census Agglomeration, the urban core must have a population of at least 10,000.

Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Agglomerations (CAs) are primarily subdivided into Census Tracts (CTs). CTs are areas that are small and relatively stable. They usually have a population of 2,500 to 8,000. They are located in large urban centres that must have an urban core population of 50,000 or more.

A Census Tract (CT) is then subdivided into Dissemination Areas (The same geographic unit described above)

The rest of the story:

CMA/CA > CT > DA

Now you know the basic Census geographical units and the initials associated with each.

For descriptions of some of the other less commonly used geographical units or to read complete and technical definitions see:

[2006 Census Geography - Illustrated Glossary](#)

[Click here for a list of 2001 Census resources for accessing local level data.](#)

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