

THE AVERAGE AGE OF MOTHERS AT FIRST BIRTH

The average age of first-time mothers has steadily increased from 23.5 years of age in 1965 to 29.4 years of age in 2019. This followed a period, from 1945-65, during which the average age declined.

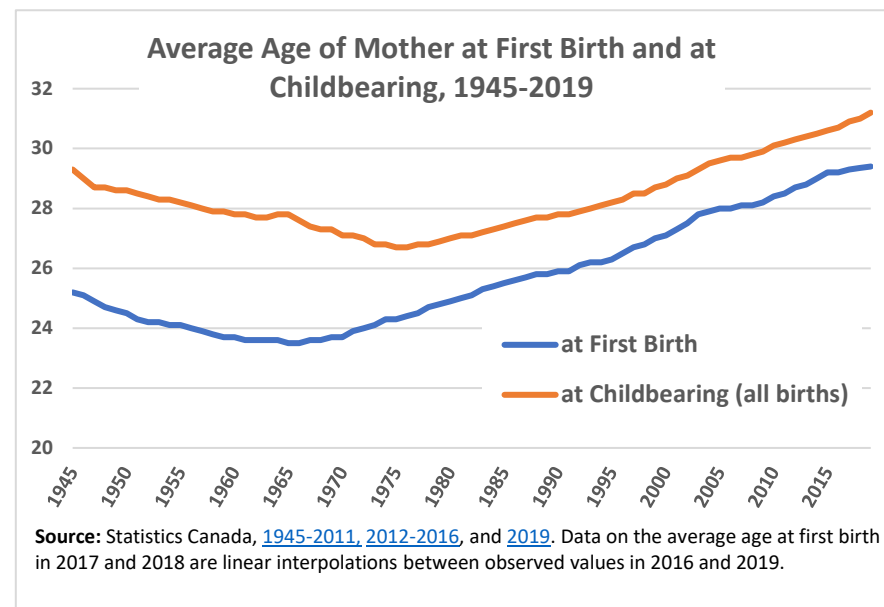
The figure shows the evolution of two time series, the average age of mothers at the birth of their first child and the average age of mothers at all child births. The positions of the two lines differ because the average mother over this period gave birth to more than one child. The vertical distance between the lines gets smaller when the average mother has fewer children and/or when the time between births grows shorter.

Similar provincial data are available since 2012. Since 2012, the age of mothers at first birth has been consistently lowest in Saskatchewan and consistently highest in British Columbia. In 2019, the difference was 3.1 years (27.3 years in Saskatchewan versus 30.4 years in BC). Since 2012, the average age of mothers at first birth has increased in all provinces. It has increased the most in Alberta (by 1.1 years) and the least in Quebec (by 0.4 years).

Across provinces, the average age of first-time mothers is lowest in Saskatchewan and highest in British Columbia. Since 2012, the average age of first-time mothers has increased most quickly in Alberta.

The fact they continue unchanged through economic booms and busts and across all provinces suggests that these trends have more to do with changing societal norms than with financial considerations, such as the cost of living and the cost of childcare. Financial considerations are more likely the culprit for explaining differences across provinces than they are for explaining these 50-year long trends. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that the average age of mothers at first birth is highest in provinces like British Columbia and Ontario, where housing costs, and costs of living in general, have proven to be consistently higher than in other provinces.

If only for reasons of human biology, we can expect the average age of mothers at first



birth to eventually plateau. But at what age? International data show that amongst [OECD](#) countries, the average age of Canadian mothers at first birth in 2016 was near the OECD average (29.2 years), but noticeably lower than in countries like Spain (30.8) and Italy (31.0). There would seem to be room for still further extensions in the trends shown in the figure.

The postponement of family formation has implications for how many children women choose to conceive, if any, following the birth of the first child. The observed [fall in the fertility rate](#) below that which is necessary to maintain current population levels may therefore be tied to these trends. This in turn, has implications for many public policies, from decisions regarding school construction to the financing of pensions. They also have implications for decisions about setting immigration targets sufficient to prevent Canada's population and GDP from stagnating.