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## **Demographics are Putting Upward Pressure on Canada's C-Section Rate**

*Canadian women are choosing to delay childbirth until later in life, and Canada's birth rate is near the lowest ever recorded. At the same time, human resource shortages in maternity care are changing where, when, and how babies are being delivered.*

### **In Canada:**

- In 2005, the average age of mothers at the birth of their children was 29.2 years, 2.5 years higher than in 1975.<sup>1</sup>
- Canada's crude birth rate of 10.6 births per 1,000 people in 2005 was one of the lowest on record since the government began collecting these rates in 1921. The lowest recorded rate was 10.5, recorded in 2002 and 2004.<sup>2</sup>
- Despite slight increases in the early part of this decade, Canada's fertility rate – the estimated number of children women will have in their lifetime - remains very low. In 2005, the fertility rate was 1.54 children per woman, well below the "replacement rate" of 2.1 children.<sup>2</sup>
- The "full service" family physician is often the maternity care provider for a rural or remote community. CIHI and Statistics Canada data reveal that the percentage of births attended by Canadian family physicians fell from 37 percent in 1996/97 to 28 percent of total births in 2002/03. Partially, these numbers reflect Canada's declining birth rate, a demographic trend which is reducing the viability of "small volume" birth centres in rural Canada.<sup>3</sup>
- Despite Canada's falling birth rate, the demand for maternity care still exceeds the number of physicians available to provide the services. The number of family physicians that deliver babies as part of their practice is also in decline, placing stress on Canada's maternity healthcare system.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Impact of women having children later in life:***

Older mothers are more likely to require C-sections for delivery. Data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information has shown that the average age of Canadian women who had a C-section in 2005–2006 was 30.4 years, compared to 28.7 for women who had a vaginal delivery.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Impact of women having fewer children:***

A woman is more likely to require a C-section when she is giving birth for the first time, compared to a woman who has given birth vaginally before. First-time births now account for a larger proportion of total births, causing the rate of C-sections to rise.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Impact of having fewer hospitals and healthcare professionals providing maternity care:***

Rural hospital closures, centralization of maternity services in urban centres, and maternal unit closures in rural hospitals have reduced access to maternity services. Women in rural areas, particularly those who may experience a high-risk delivery, may be required to leave their communities and travel long distances to the nearest urban centre to give birth. In these cases, an elective c-section may be performed to allow the childbirth to be scheduled.<sup>5</sup>

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## The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada ...

- Believes that it is time for healthcare professionals who are able to support the birthing process (obstetricians, family physicians, nurses, and midwives) to adopt a more collaborative approach to maternity care
- Believes that the government of Canada must recognize that there is a problem in the delivery of maternity care in Canada (especially as it relates to rural, remote, and Aboriginal communities) and that they should support the implementation of the *National Birthing Initiative* and the *Aboriginal Birthing Initiative*.

## References

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3. **SOGC**  
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4. **Canadian Institute for Health Information**  
*Giving Birth in Canada: Regional Trends From 2001–2002 to 2005–2006*  
[http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/en/downloads/Childbirth\\_AiB\\_FINAL\\_E.pdf](http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/en/downloads/Childbirth_AiB_FINAL_E.pdf)
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## About the SOGC

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC) is one of Canada's oldest national specialty organizations. Established in 1944, the Society's mission is to promote excellence in the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology and to advance the health of women through leadership, advocacy, collaboration, outreach and education. The SOGC represents obstetricians/gynaecologists, family physicians, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals working in the field of sexual reproductive health. For more information, visit [www.sogc.org](http://www.sogc.org).