



Education Stratifier: Guidance on Measuring and Reporting Health Inequalities

Definition

Construct: Educational attainment

The Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) uses educational attainment for measuring and reporting education-related inequality in the population. Educational attainment refers to the highest level of schooling achieved.

Measure: Highest self-reported educational attainment

To measure inequality along the full gradient of self-reported educational attainment, CIHI suggests using a 5-category approach (see the table below).

Table Reporting categories for self-reported educational attainment

Categories	Percentage of population
Less than secondary (high) school graduation	18.3%
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalent	26.5%
Some post-secondary education	32.0%
Bachelor's degree completion	15.5%
Post-secondary school completion above bachelor's degree	7.7%

Note

Percentages are based on the total population age 15 and older in private households.

Source

Statistics Canada. [Census Profile, 2016 Census](#). Accessed February 3, 2022.





How can I access education data?

Data on educational attainment is available through national surveys, including Statistics Canada's Census of Population and Canadian Community Health Survey.

CIHI's [Measuring Health Inequalities: A Toolkit — Equity Stratifier Inventory](#) is periodically updated with a complete list of the stratifier information available in CIHI's databases, as well as in certain Statistics Canada databases.

Variations

If it is not possible to create 5 categories of educational attainment (e.g., due to small sample sizes in certain categories), education categories can be rolled up as follows:

- 4 categories
 - Less than secondary (high) school graduation
 - Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalent
 - Some post-secondary education
 - Post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree
- 2 categories
 - Less than secondary (high) school graduation
 - Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalent and above

Key considerations

- If available, consider using highest self-reported educational attainment at the **household level** rather than the person level (i.e., the highest level of education completed by any member of the household is applied to all members of that household). This is particularly relevant for health inequality analyses for children and youth, given that their health care decisions are dependent on adult household members.
- If available, area-level educational attainment can be used when individual- or household-level data is not available. This is measured and reported as the proportion of residents who have attained a specified level of education (e.g., high school completion) living in a defined geographic area (e.g., census dissemination area).
- Measures of educational attainment are typically based on formal programs and completion (i.e., certificates, diplomas or degrees). However, individuals can also gain meaningful education through life experiences that may not be recognized in educational attainment measures.



Statistics Canada's standards

[Classification of highest educational attainment](#), May 26, 2021, to current

Related resources

See the [CIHI Reference Data Model Toolkit](#) for more information on minimum data collection values and labels.

Visit the [Equity stratifiers page](#) for guidance on additional stratifiers.

Version history

June 2022	Updated text and format for information sheet. Updated percentages in table to 2016 data (previously 2013–2014 data).
April 2018	Initial definition released as part of In Pursuit of Health Equity: Defining Stratifiers for Measuring Health Inequality (PDF) .

How to cite this document:

Canadian Institute for Health Information. *Education Stratifier: Guidance on Measuring and Reporting Health Inequalities*. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2022.