

Geographic Terms

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The following geographic terms are adapted from the standard definition of Census geography from Statistics Canada.

Block-face

A block-face is one side of a street between two consecutive features intersecting that street. The features can be other streets or boundaries of standard geographic areas.

Census consolidated subdivision

A census consolidated subdivision (CCS) is a group of adjacent census subdivisions. Generally, the smaller, more densely-populated census subdivisions (towns, villages, etc.) are combined with the surrounding, larger, more rural census subdivision, in order to create a geographic level between the census subdivision and the census division.

Census division

Census division (CD) is the general term for provincially legislated areas (such as county and regional district) or their equivalents. Census divisions are intermediate geographic areas between the province/territory level and the municipality (census subdivision).

Census metropolitan area and census agglomeration

A census metropolitan area (CMA) or a census agglomeration (CA) is formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more must live in the core.

A CA must have a core population of at least 10,000. To be included in the CMA or CA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the core, as measured by commuting flows derived from previous census place of work data.

If the population of the core of a CA declines below 10,000, the CA is retired. However, once an area becomes a CMA, it is retained as a CMA even if its total population declines below 100,000 or the population of its core falls below 50,000. Small population centres with a population count of less than 10,000 are called fringe. All areas inside the CMA or CA that are not population centres are rural areas.

When a CA has a core of at least 50,000, it is subdivided into census tracts. Census tracts are maintained for the CA even if the population of the core subsequently falls below 50,000. All CMAs are subdivided into census tracts.

Census metropolitan influenced zone

The census metropolitan influenced zone (MIZ) is a concept that geographically

differentiates the area of Canada outside census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs). Census subdivisions that are outside CMAs and CAs within provinces are assigned to one of four categories according to the degree of influence (strong, moderate, weak or no influence) that the CMAs or CAs have on them. The CSDs in the territories but outside CAs are assigned a separate category.

Census subdivisions (CSDs) within provinces are assigned to a MIZ category based on the percentage of their resident employed labour force that commutes to work in the core(s) of CMAs or CAs. CSDs with the same degree of influence tend to be clustered. They form zones around CMAs and CAs that progress through the categories from 'strong' to 'no' influence as distance from the CMAs and CAs increases. As many CSDs in the territories are very large and sparsely populated, the commuting flow of the resident employed labour force is unstable. For this reason, CSDs that are outside CAs in the territories are assigned a separate category that is not based on their commuting flows.

Census subdivision

Census subdivision (CSD) is the general term for municipalities (as determined by provincial/territorial legislation) or areas treated as municipal equivalents for statistical purposes (e.g., Indian reserves, Indian settlements and unorganized territories).

Census tract

Census tracts (CTs) are small, relatively stable geographic areas that usually have a population of 2,500 to 8,000 persons. They are located in census metropolitan areas and in census agglomerations that had a core population of 50,000 or more in the previous census.

A committee of local specialists (for example, planners, health and social workers, and educators) initially delineates census tracts in conjunction with Statistics Canada. Once a census metropolitan area (CMA) or census agglomeration (CA) has been subdivided into census tracts, the census tracts are maintained even if the core population subsequently declines below 50,000.

Core, fringe and rural area

The terms 'core,' 'fringe' and 'rural area' replace the terms 'urban core,' 'urban fringe' and 'rural fringe' for the 2011 Census. These terms distinguish between population centres (POPCTRs) and rural areas (RAs) within a census metropolitan area (CMA) or census agglomeration (CA).

A CMA or CA can have two types of cores: the core and the secondary core. The core is the population centre with the highest population, around which a CMA or a CA is delineated. The core must have a population (based on the previous census) of at least 50,000 persons in the case of a CMA, or at least 10,000 persons in the case of a CA.

The secondary core is a population centre within a CMA that has at least 10,000 persons and was the core of a CA that has been merged with an adjacent CMA.

The term 'fringe' includes all population centres within a CMA or CA that have less than 10,000 persons and are not contiguous with the core or secondary core.

All territory within a CMA or CA that is not classified as a core or fringe is classified as rural area.

Dissemination area

A dissemination area (DA) is a small, relatively stable geographic unit composed of one or more adjacent dissemination blocks. It is the smallest standard geographic area for which all census data are disseminated. DAs cover all the territory of Canada.

Dissemination block

A dissemination block (DB) is an area bounded on all sides by roads and/or boundaries of standard geographic areas. The dissemination block is the smallest geographic area for which population and dwelling counts are disseminated. Dissemination blocks cover all the territory of Canada.

FSA: Forward Sortation Area

The forward sortation area (FSA) is the first three characters of the postal code, designating a postal delivery area within Canada. FSAs are associated with a postal facility from which mail delivery originates. The average number of households served by an FSA is approximately 8,000, but the number can range from zero to more than 60,000 households. This wide range of households can occur because some FSAs may serve only businesses (zero households) and some FSAs serve very large geographic areas.

Land area

Land area is the area in square kilometres of the land-based portions of standard geographic areas.

Population centre

A population centre (POPCTR) has a population of at least 1,000 and a population density of 400 or more persons per square kilometre, based on the current census population count.

Population centres are classified into three groups, depending on the size of their population:

- small population centres, with a population between 1,000 and 29,999
- medium population centres, with a population between 30,000 and 99,999
- large urban population centres, with a population of 100,000 or more

Population centre population includes all population living in the cores, secondary cores and fringes of census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs), as well as the population living in population centres outside CMAs and CAs.

Population density

Population density is the number of persons per square kilometre.

Postal code

The postal code is a six-character code defined and maintained by Canada Post Corporation (CPC) for the purpose of sorting and delivering mail. The characters are arranged in the form 'ANA NAN', where 'A' represents an alphabetic character and 'N' represents a numeric character (e.g., K1A 0T6). The postal code uses 18 alphabetic characters and 10 numeric characters. Eight alphabetic characters (D, F, I, O, Q, U, W and Z) are not in use at the present time.

The first character of a postal code is allocated in alphabetic sequence from east to west across Canada and denotes a province, territory, or a major sector found entirely within the boundaries of a province

Province/territory/region	First character of Postal code
Newfoundland and Labrador	A
Nova Scotia	B
Prince Edward Island	C
New Brunswick	E
Eastern Québec	G
Metropolitan Montréal	H
Western Québec	J
Eastern Ontario	K
Central Ontario	L
Metropolitan Toronto	M
Southwestern Ontario	N
Northern Ontario	P
Manitoba	R
Saskatchewan	S
Alberta	T
British Columbia	V
Northwest Territories and Nunavut	X
Yukon	Y

The first three characters of the postal code ('ANA') represent a set of well-defined and stable areas known as Forward Sortation Areas (FSAs). The FSA represents a specific area within a major geographical region or province/territory.

Rural postal codes are identifiable by the presence of a zero (0) in the second position of the FSA code.

Urban postal codes are composed of FSAs with numerals 1 to 9 in the second position of the code.

The last three characters of the postal code ('NAN') identify routes known as local delivery units (LDUs).

In population centres, a single postal code may correspond to the following types of LDU:

- a block-face (one side of a city street between consecutive intersections)
- a community mailbox (commonly called super mailboxes)
- an apartment building
- a business building
- a large firm/organisation that does considerable business with CPC
- a federal government department, agency or branch
- a mail delivery route (rural, suburban or mobile)
- general delivery at a specific post office
- one or more post office boxes.

A community mailbox postal code services both odd and even sides of the same street, or different streets, within a 200 metre radius of the community mailbox.

In rural FSAs, the LDU generally refers to services which originate from a post office or postal station. These include rural routes, general deliveries, post office boxes, and suburban services. Often, in rural FSAs, the postal code identifies a specific rural community.

Rural area

Rural population includes all population living in the rural areas of census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs), as well as population living in rural areas outside CMAs and CAs.

Thematic map

A thematic map shows the spatial distribution of one or more specific data themes for selected geographic areas. The map may be qualitative in nature (e.g., predominant farm types) or quantitative (e.g., percentage population change).

Urban area

An urban area has a minimum population concentration of 1,000 persons and a population density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre, based on the current census population count. All territory outside urban areas is classified as rural. Taken together, urban and rural areas cover all of Canada.

Urban population includes all population living in the urban cores, secondary urban cores and urban fringes of census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs), as well as the population living in urban areas outside CMAs and CAs.

Core, fringe and rural area

These terms distinguish between population centres (POPCTRs) and rural areas (RAs) within a census metropolitan area (CMA) or census agglomeration (CA).

A CMA or CA can have two types of cores: the core and the secondary core. The core is the population centre with the highest population, around which a CMA or a CA is delineated. The core must have a population (based on the previous census) of at least 50,000 persons in the case of a CMA, or at least 10,000 persons in the case of a CA.

The secondary core is a population centre within a CMA that has at least 10,000 persons and was the core of a CA that has been merged with an adjacent CMA.

The term 'fringe' includes all population centres within a CMA or CA that have less than 10,000 persons and are not contiguous with the core or secondary core.

All territory within a CMA or CA that is not classified as a core or fringe is classified as rural area.