



# LOW-INCOME POPULATION ESTIMATE AND FORECAST

June 15, 2025

The City of Calgary's Demographics and Evaluation team, part of the Community Strategies Business Unit conducts an analysis of low-income population estimate and forecast annually, to identify the proportion of individuals and families living in low income relative to the general population. **In 2024, an estimated 211,374 people in Calgary were living in low income, based on the Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax (CFLIM-AT), representing approximately 14% of the population.** There are various low-income concepts, or different ways of defining and measuring low income. It is important to clarify the purpose or use of the low-income statistics, as different data sources and low-income measures yield varying estimates. For more information on these sources and concepts, please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions in the next section.

## Data Sources and Methodology

The T1 Family File (T1FF) provides annual income and demographic information based on income tax returns submitted to the Canada Revenue Agency<sup>1</sup>. This data includes nearly all individuals who filed an individual T1 tax return and recipients of federal child benefits, representing approximately 94 per cent of the Canadian population<sup>2</sup>. The latest release of T1FF data in June 2024 is used to calculate number and percentage of people in low income in Calgary, as shown in Table 1. The most recent municipal level (or census subdivision) data is sourced from the Community Data Program published in August 2024 for the **2022 tax year**.

The low-income population forecast is calculated using the average of the most recent three years of CFLIM-AT data, alongside Calgary's population outlook provided by The City of Calgary's Corporate Economics Division. Corporate Economics updates Calgary's population outlook every June, releasing this in the [Spring Calgary and Region Economic Outlook](#). The low-income population forecast will be updated annually as new CFLIM-AT and Calgary population outlook data become available.

## Estimate and Forecast

Based on the most recent FCLIM-AT data from 2020 to 2022, the three-year moving average percentage of people in low income is projected to be 14 per cent. As seen in Table 1, the forecasted number of people in low income for 2023 to 2025 are shown in gray.

In 2023, an estimated 199,105 people were in low income. In 2024, this estimate is 211,374. And for 2025, an estimated 218,763 people are in low income. The forecasted counts are lower compared to 2022 because the three-year moving average percentage is lower. The moving average will be updated as more recent data becomes available. Although this forecast is an estimate, it can help programs and services assess whether their financial or physical resources are sufficient to meet the needs of Calgary's low-income population and plan accordingly for the future.

Table 1: Calgary Low-Income Population Estimate and Forecast, based on T1 Family File Census family low-income measure, after tax (CFLIM-AT)			
Year	Total Population	Per Cent	Counts
2020	1,302,437	11.9%	154,990
2021	1,319,280	13.9%	183,380
2022	1,379,068	16.1%	222,030
2023	1,422,179*	14.0%**	199,105
2024	1,509,811*	14.0%**	211,374
2025	1,562,595*	14.0%**	218,763

\*Corporate Economics Population Outlook, as of June 2025  
\*\* Estimated percentage of individuals in low income based on T1FF low-income three-year moving average

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the T1 Family File, please see Frequently Asked Questions in the next section

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada. June 27, 2024. Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals (T1 Family File). [Surveys and statistical programs - Annual Income Estimates for Census Families and Individuals \(T1 Family File\)](#)

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. The City of Calgary used to produce low-income estimates using the Census Low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT), why is the T1 Family File Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax (CFLIM-AT) used for low-income estimates now?**

Prior to 2025, the City of Calgary utilized the Census Low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT) to estimate the number and percentage of people in low incomes, due to its consistency and reliability. However, the Census data is only available every five years and there is a lag between the data collection, processing, and release of results. The Census data collection methodology also excludes certain populations like people living on reserves or collective dwellings, which do not affect low-income estimates for larger geographies like at the provincial or the census metropolitan area level. Population differences are more likely be affected at lower levels of geography, like the municipal (census subdivision) level. LIM-AT remains useful for other purposes like the [Calgary Equity Index](#), combining multiple data points to compare data across geographic areas.

The T1 Family File Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax (CFLIM-AT) addresses these gaps because it is released more frequently and provides a better population coverage at the municipal (census subdivision) level. The methodology to collect CFLIM-AT data was updated in 2018 to improve conceptual comparability with other Statistics Canada products like the Census LIM-AT. CFLIM-AT data at the municipal (census subdivision) level did not become available until 2019 so this product was not explored before. CFLIM-AT is also being used by the City of Edmonton as one of the poverty indicators.

**2. Statistics Canada offers three main data sources for low-income estimates -the Census of Population, Canadian Income Survey, and the T1 Family File. What are the main differences between these three data sources?**

As seen in Table 2, the main differences between the three data sources include the source of data, the frequency of data availability, population coverage, and the unit of analysis for low-income estimate. *Census* data is a comprehensive count of the entire Canadian population, it is collected every five years through questionnaires on various socio-economic topics and combines the information with other data from Canada Revenue Agency T1 income tax and benefit returns. Low-income measures are derived from households<sup>3</sup>, however, excludes populations from people that live on reserves and collective dwellings<sup>4</sup> such as senior’s homes, hospitals, hotels, jails and work lodgings.

*Canadian Income Survey (CIS)* collects data from a probability sample of the Canadian population, is collected annually, and is meant to be a supplement to the Labour Force Survey. CIS is like the Census in terms of unit of analysis and population coverage. Since CIS collects data from a sample of the population, it does not accurately capture the total number and percentage of people in-low incomes in Calgary due to sample variability.

The *T1 Family File (T1FF)* resembles the Census in that it contains income information for a large majority of individuals residing in Canada. T1FF is collected annually and includes almost all individuals who file an individual T1 tax return. Low-income measures are derived from census families<sup>5</sup> and includes populations from those that live on reserves and collective dwellings.

Key Difference	Census of Population	Canadian Income Survey	T1 Family File
Source of data	Questionnaires on various socio-economic topics completed by All Canadians, and combines information with Canada Revenue Agency’s T1 income tax and benefits	Questionnaires from sub-sample of Labour Force Survey respondents	Administrative records from Canada Revenue Agency’s T1 income tax and benefit returns and from Canada’s Child Tax Benefits program data
Frequency	Every five years	Annual	Annual
Population of Coverage	Population in private households, excluding population from collective dwellings and reserves	Population in private households, excluding population from collective dwellings and reserves	All tax filers and their dependents, and includes people living in collective dwellings and on reserves
Unit of analysis for low-income estimate	Household income	Household income	Census family income

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada defines [household](#) as a person or a group of people occupying the same dwelling, regardless of their relationship to each other.

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada defines [collective dwelling](#) as a dwelling of a commercial, institutional, or communal nature.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada defines [census families](#) as married couples or couples living common law with or without children, or lone parents with at least one child living in the same dwelling.

In general, the Census calculate the Low-income measure, After Tax (LIM-AT) using household income while the T1FF uses census family income to calculate the Census Family Low Income Measure, After Tax (CFLIM-AT). For population coverage, the Census does not collect data from those that live in collective dwellings and reserves due to data collection limitations. T1FF uses administrative data so exempt from these limitations. For instance, comparing the 2020 number and percentage of people in low incomes in Calgary from two data sources, CFLIM-AT data as seen in Table 1 establishes 154,990 people, or 11.9% of people in low income in Calgary. Compared to the Census data, 115,560 people, or 8.9% of people in low income in Calgary. While the total Calgary population are similar from both data sources (a difference of 10,667 people), CFLIM-AT estimates 39,430 more people in low-incomes than the Census.

**3. What is the difference between household, census family, and economic family units of analysis?**

While income data is collected for individuals, it is useful to examine income situations of families or households since income may be pooled together and shared to pay for expenses<sup>6</sup>. Statistics Canada refers *household* as a person or a group of people occupying the same dwelling, regardless of their relationship to each other. *Economic families* are groups of two or more people living in the same dwelling who are related to each other by blood, marriage, common law, or adoption. *Census families* are married couples or couples living common law with or without children, or lone parents with at least one child living in the same dwelling. Households and economic families are larger units of measure compared to census families, so one household or one economic family may include multiple census families. For instance, two families living in the same private dwelling is considered one household or one economic family but is considered two census families. The different units of analysis affect the adjusted median income calculations, which contributes to the variability of low-income estimates.

**4. Statistics Canada uses three standard low-income concepts – Low-Income Measure (LIM), Market Basket Measure (MBM), and Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). What are the main differences between these low-income concepts?**

Low-income indicators are commonly used to identifying population groups that are at risk of social and economic hardship at a particular time, or over time. Low-income data is often available for before tax or after tax, depending on data purpose. The key differences between the different low-income concepts are shown in Table 3.

Key Difference	Census Family Low Income Measure	Low-Income Measure	Market Basket Measure	Low Income Cut-Off
Data Source	T1 Family File	Census of Population	Census of Population	Census of Population
Geography	No regional variation	No regional variation	53 regions	Size of area of residence
Threshold	Half the median adjusted income	Half the median of adjusted income	Price of the basket of goods and services for the reference family	Income level at which families usually spend 20 percentage points more than the average family on shelter, food and clothing
Advantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data available annually</li> <li>Better population coverage at the municipal geographical level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most widely used low-income indicator internationally as low-income comparison is relative to the overall income distribution within a society</li> <li>Used in Calgary Equity Index to compare with other indicators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflects the up-to-date cost of a basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living for a particular region and family size</li> <li>Canada’s official measure of poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Useful for determining income-based program eligibility as it is comparable to line 15000 on an applicant’s notice of assessment</li> <li>Used by programs that support low-income populations like Fair Entry to determine eligibility</li> </ul>
Disadvantage	Does not factor in cost of living	Does not factor in cost of living	Basket of goods and services may not accurately reflect changes in consumer spending habits or emerging essential items	Does not account for current costs or what people spend money on today (i.e. internet)

Source: Statistics Canada. March 29, 2023. [Low-income concepts and statistics, 2021 Census of Population](#)

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. March 29, 2023. [Aggregated and derived income concepts and income statistics, 2021 Census of Population](#)

*The Low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT)*, one of the most widely used low-income indicator internationally, is a relative measure of low income, and the threshold refers to 50% of median adjusted after-tax income of the unit of analysis<sup>7</sup>. LIM-ATs do not factor in specific cost of living or geographical variations. The low-income measure, before tax is also available, but Statistics Canada recommends using LIM-AT for most analytical needs regarding the topic of low income because it accounts for the reduced spending power after all government transfers including taxes are accounted for.

*Market Basket Measure (MBM)*, as Canada's official measure of poverty, is based on the cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other items for a family of four that reflects a modest, basic standard of living. The MBM threshold is on the disposable income, by deducting income taxes and non-discretionary spending, such as mandatory payroll deductions, medical expenses and childcare expenses from total income<sup>8</sup>. MBM takes in cost considerations for different geographical regions but is only available for the 25% of the Census sample population due to some of the expenses information is only collected through the Census long-form questionnaire.

*Low Income cut-off (LICO)* is an income threshold set by Statistics Canada below which individuals or families would likely have devoted a larger share of their total income than average to the necessities of food, shelter and clothing<sup>9</sup>. LICO is based on spending and the threshold varies by family size and area of residence. The LICO threshold is still based on 1992 cost of living adjusted for inflation, so Statistics Canada recommends using other low-income indicators when they are available. Low-income data is also available for before tax or after tax, depending on data purpose. Typically, LICO-BT remains useful for determining any income-based program eligibility as it is comparable to Line 15000 of applicant's notice of assessment (NOA) from Canada Revenue Agency. Line 15000 on an applicant's NOA shows whether their total income is below LICO-BT, which is relatively easy to provide as proof of financial eligibility.

**5. Can the CFLIM-AT be estimated for geographies smaller than the municipal (census subdivision) level, such as the community or ward level?**

CFLIM-AT is based on tax filers data, which means geography is based on the tax filer's mailing address at the time of filing. It is recommended that CFLIM-AT should NOT be calculated at the community and ward level because mailing addresses used during tax filing may not necessarily be the tax filer's residential addresses. For instance, some people use the mailing addresses of their accountants when they file their taxes, so it may seem like there are lots of individuals in low incomes in the accountant's mailing address, but in fact those individuals' residential addresses are in different communities. For community level low-income data in Calgary, it is best to use data from the Census, which is available at: <https://www.calgary.ca/communities/profiles.html>. For Ward level low-income data, please visit: <https://www.calgary.ca/communities/profiles/wards.html>

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<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada. July 13, 2022. *Low-income measure, after tax. (LIM-AT)*. [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Low-income measure, after tax \(LIM-AT\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. July 13, 2022. *Market Basket Measure (MBM)*. [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Market Basket Measure \(MBM\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. July 13, 2022. *Low-income cut-offs, before tax (LICO-BT)*. [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Low-income cut-offs, before tax](#)