

# A Portrait of the Population

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The public health administration for the Laurentian region recently published a statistical portrait of the health and well-being of the population of the Laurentians. The information is divided up by MRC, each of which roughly corresponds to the territory served by a single CSSS. In our case, the CSSS des Sommets is responsible for the MRC des Laurentides.

The wide-ranging information allows the health and social service providers to look at the populations they serve and to compare the residents of each MRC to the Laurentians as a whole and to the entire province. Looking at the figures allows us to see who we are and what shape we're in and guides the institutions responsible to us as they plan their services.

For example, looking at the demographic statistics, there has been a 6% increase in the number of births in the period 2002-2006 compared to 1997-2001. At the same time, the proportion of the population that is elderly is increasing sharply and is projected to rise by 44.8% in the 65-74 range and 36.3% in the 75 and over group in the next ten years. In addition, the MRC des Laurentides has the highest proportion of seasonal residents in the Laurentians, a total of 47.1% of the total population.

At the same time, we have a greater number of single-parent families and school dropouts than the rest of the province, and more females smoke here than elsewhere. On the plus side, though, the obesity rate is lower and the general state of health is better. In fact, among men 69.1% say they are in excellent health in the MRC des Laurentides as compared to only 58.9% in the Laurentians as a whole.

While we feel that our health is good, some of the statistics belie that. For example, the cancer rate here is higher than the provincial average, particularly for lung, prostate and colorectal cancers among men and lung cancer among women. Interestingly, and possibly tied to the lower rate of obesity, diabetes strikes considerably fewer residents of the MRC des Laurentides than is the case elsewhere in the Laurentians. But, even with our apparently healthier lifestyle, a higher proportion of the population has had diagnoses of hypertension, arthritis and rheumatism than found in the rest of the Laurentians or the province.

Death rates for the population have several interesting variations. Overall, the rate for men is lower but the rates for respiratory tract problems and prostate cancer are higher compared to the balance of the Laurentian region and the province. The overall mortality and cancer rates for women are higher but the breast cancer, circulatory and respiratory system rates are lower than the average. We are also way above the average in accidental deaths and suicides.

What does this all mean? The administration of the CSSS des Sommets takes into account the variations in the needs of our local population when planning, and develop programs that address our particular needs, all the while using statistics such as these to persuade the provincial government to adequately fund the institution so that it can meet the priorities of the local community rather than the provincial or regional averages.

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