

## CHAPTER 1

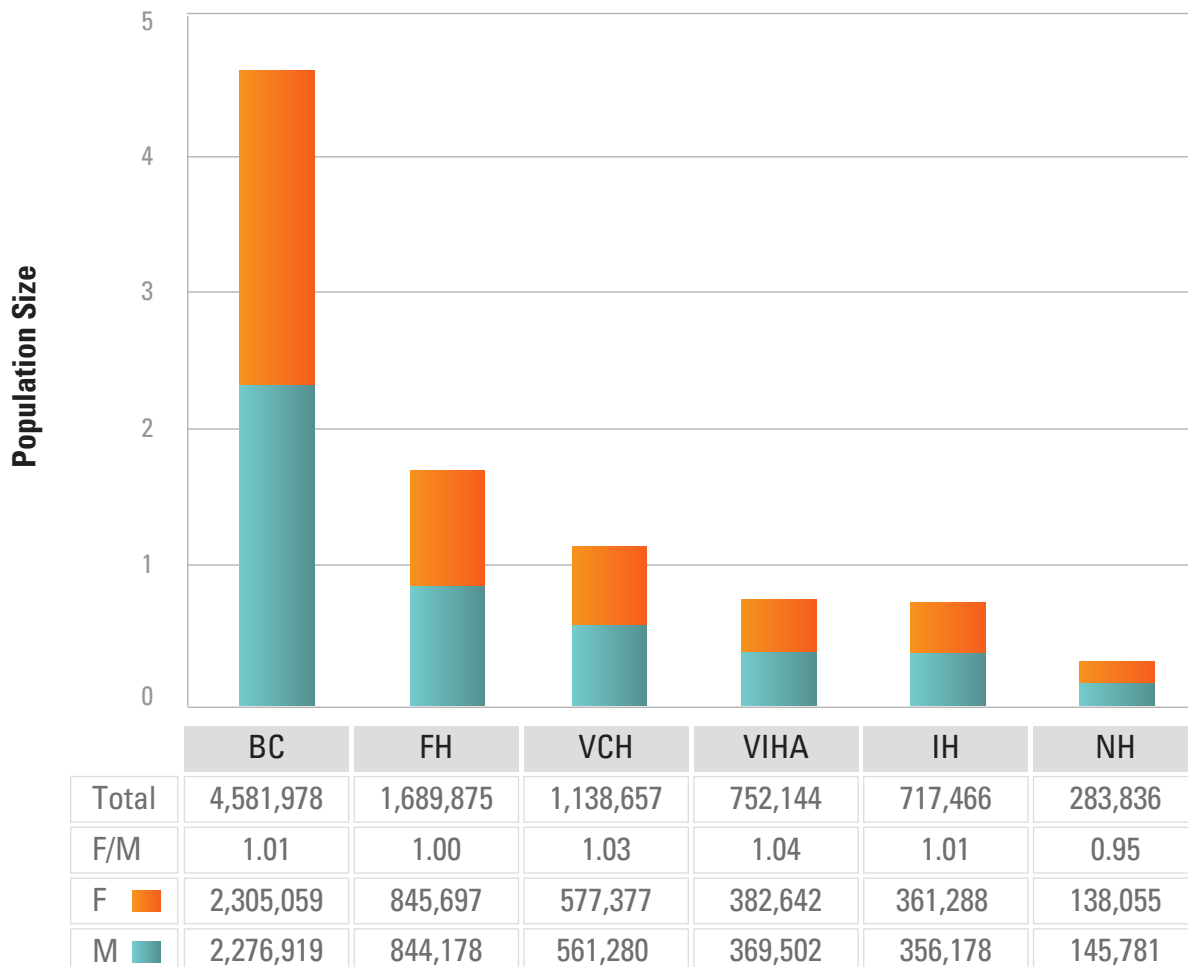
# DEMOGRAPHICS OF BC POPULATION

The population of BC continues to increase; it was 3.00 million in 1986 and reached 4.58 million in 2013. When broken down by health authority (HA), the smallest geographic region FH has the largest population at about 1.69 million in 2013; VCH has 1.14 million, VIHA 0.75 million, IH 0.72 million and NH, the largest geographic region, has the smallest population with 0.28 million (Figure 1.2). Overall, there are slightly more females than males in BC, with a female to male ratio of 1.01; similar trends exist in all HAs except NH which has more males than females (0.95).<sup>7</sup>

Demographic analysis of the general population is useful to understand at-risk populations and compare the rate of occurrence of a disease or event across different regions. NH has a comparatively young population compared to the other health authorities.<sup>9</sup> Age adjusted rates or *standardised ratios* take into account the age of the population.

### Population

Figure 1.2 BC population size based on health authority in 2013<sup>7</sup>

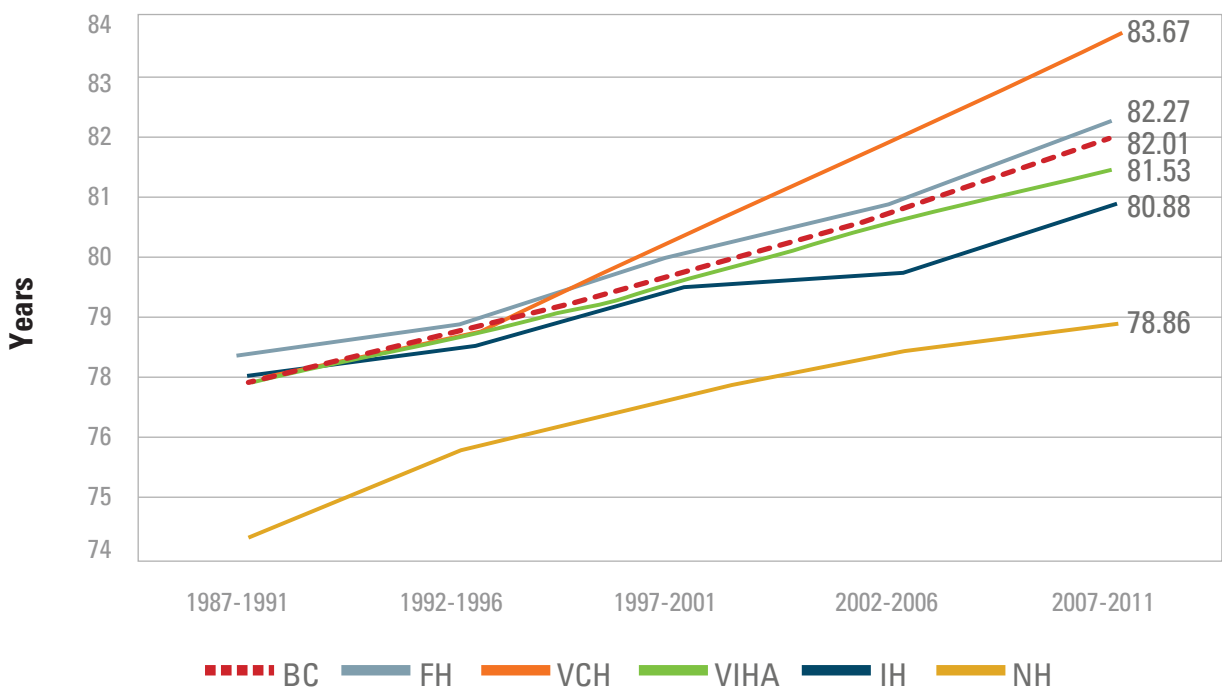


## Life Expectancy

Life expectancy at birth (the average number of years a person may expect to live) can be used to represent the health of a given population; i.e. healthier populations are expected to live longer. As shown in Figure 1.3, life expectancy in all BC regional

HAs increased over the past 20 years, with VCH experiencing the greatest improvement.<sup>9</sup> BC has the highest life expectancy of all provinces in Canada at 82.01 years in 2007-2011. However, there are large regional differences within BC.<sup>10,11</sup>

**Figure 1.3** Life expectancy at birth in BC based on health authority between 1987-2011<sup>11</sup>



## Housing

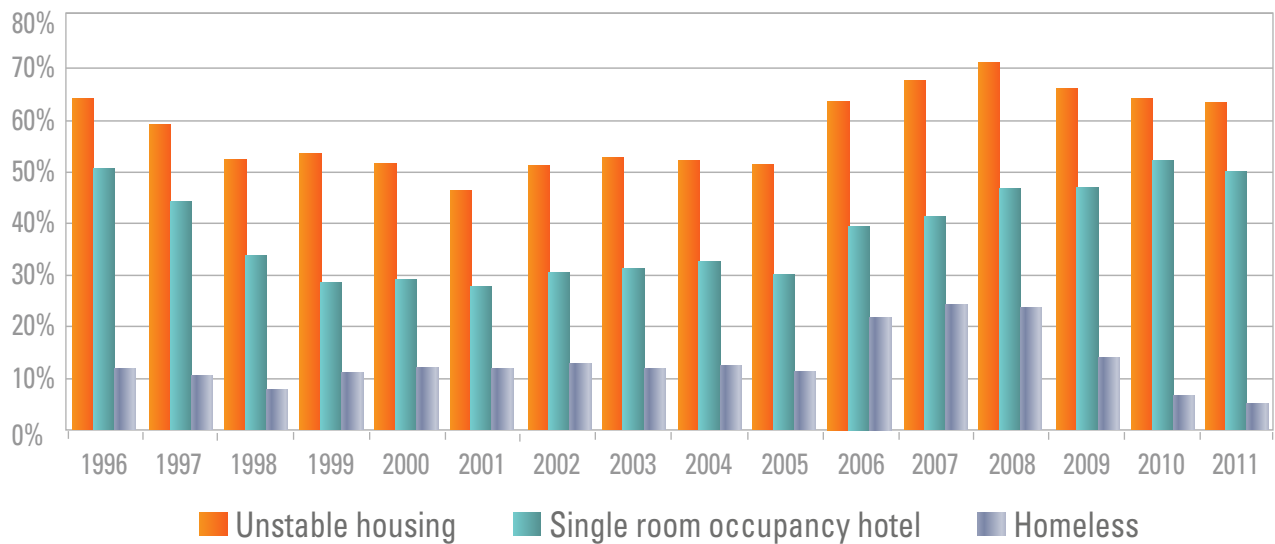
Housing is internationally recognized as a key determinant of health. BC has a shortage of ‘affordable housing’, which is defined as shelter that costs no more than 30% of one’s income.<sup>12</sup> In 2006, 29.1% of BC households spent over 30% of income on housing, compared to the Canadian average of 24.9%.<sup>13</sup> Paying more for shelter leaves fewer resources for food, clothing, and other necessities. The growing cost of housing in BC has led to increasing rates of homelessness and unstable housing, which is largely concentrated in Vancouver and other urban centres.

In BC, the recorded homeless population is disproportionately more male, Aboriginal, and middle aged.<sup>14,15</sup> Homeless and unstably housed populations have a higher prevalence of drug addiction and mental health problems.<sup>15,16</sup> In 2014, the Metro Vancouver homeless count identified 2,770 people in the Metro Vancouver region as homeless; of these, 957 lived outside or stayed temporarily with others, 200 had no fixed address, and the remaining 1,613 were staying in overnight homeless shelters, transition houses, or safe houses.<sup>16</sup> In Victoria, a 2011 facility

count found 1,143 people staying in temporary and emergency shelters.<sup>17</sup> A 2010 count for Prince George identified 287 persons as homeless or unstably housed.<sup>15</sup> Homeless counts are cross-sectional (that is they provide a snapshot at a specific time) but may underestimate the total number of homeless and unstably housed persons in these cities.

Unstable housing is defined by Urban Health Research Institute (UHRI) as living in a shelter or hostel, treatment or recovery house, jail, single room occupancy hotel, on the street, or having no fixed address.<sup>18</sup> UHRI reported 60% of people who use drugs (PWUD) in Vancouver<sup>1</sup> were unstably housed in 2011 (Figure 1.5).<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 1.5** Patterns of unstable housing, single room occupancy hotel use and homelessness among PWUD in Vancouver, 1996-2011<sup>18</sup>



**Note:** 'Unstable housing' includes living in a shelter or hostel, treatment or recovery house, jail, single room occupancy hotel, on the street, or having no fixed address.

<sup>1</sup> Determined from combined data from three longitudinal Vancouver based drug use cohorts; Vancouver Injection Drug Users Survey (VIDUS), At-Risk Youth Survey (ARYS) + AIDS Care Cohort to Evaluate access to Survival Services (ACCESS) cohorts]