

How are Residents of Saskatchewan Really Doing?

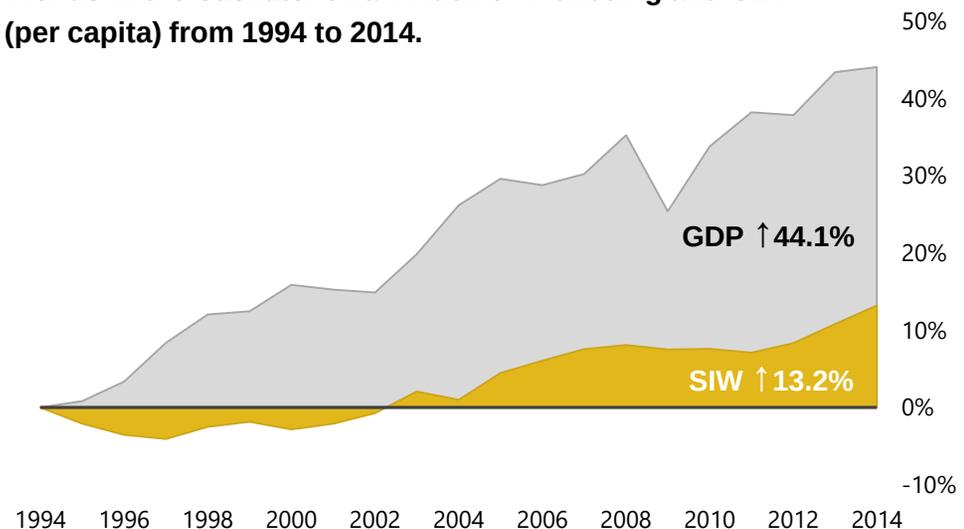


Abstract

Over the two decades from 1994 to 2014, Saskatchewan has seen tremendous growth and economic prosperity, a trend that has diminished very little despite more recent economic challenges. Indeed, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita has steadily increased over the entire period. However, everyone has not necessarily shared in this prosperity, and increases in GDP, employment rates, and income do not tell the entire story. People's quality of life, their overall wellbeing, is based on much more than economic productivity. Wellbeing is also determined by the quality of our communities and the relationships we have there; by the opportunities for being with friends and families; by the availability of quality natural environments and opportunities for engaging in all types of leisure activities; by maintaining good physical and mental health; and by the degree to which we can balance our work, family, and community lives.

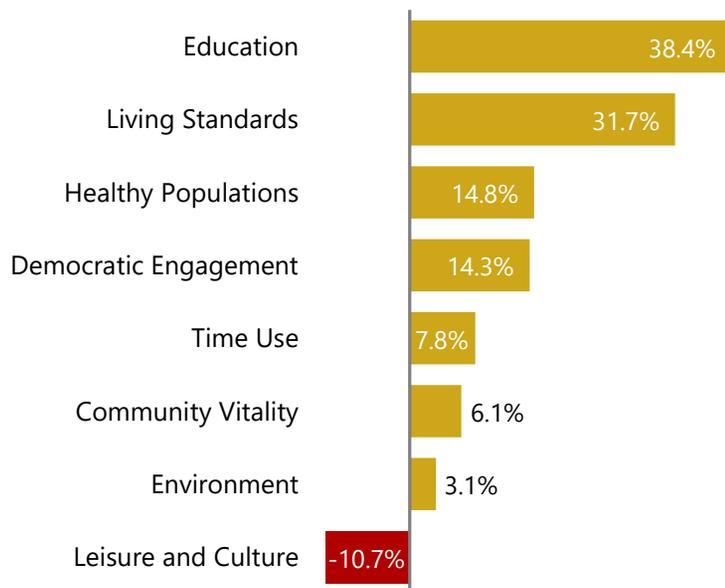
In addition, recent changes across Canada, and in Saskatchewan in particular, have introduced a number of new challenges. Some of the more prevalent challenges include increased incidence of drug use, especially opioids such as fentanyl; the still to be understood implications of the legalization of cannabis; more reports of suicide among young people; overt incidents of racism; and the rising impact of social media on populism and our democratic systems. These have all affected the way we see our lives and communities, and may have implications for our wellbeing.

Trends in the Saskatchewan Index of Wellbeing and GDP (per capita) from 1994 to 2014.



Overall, wellbeing in Saskatchewan has risen by **13.2%** since 1994, far exceeding the **9.5%** progress experienced across Canada as a whole. However, progress in wellbeing in both the province and across the country fell well short of the growth in GDP per capita – in Saskatchewan, the economy grew by **44.1%** and in Canada, by **38.0%**. Within each of the domains, we have seen varying degrees of progress – with only Leisure and Culture failing to exceed 1994 levels. **Briefly, here are the major trends:**

From 1994 to 2014, Saskatchewan has increased in all indicator areas except Leisure and Culture.



Education (↑ 38.4%)

More childcare spaces, but still inadequate; higher public school expenditures per student; higher graduation rates for high school and university, but tuition fees have increased significantly.

Living Standards (↑ 31.7%)

Median family incomes are higher, fewer people are living in poverty, and food insecurity has decreased, but the income gap is increasing; higher employment and lower unemployment rates; housing affordability is becoming an issue.

Healthy Populations (↑ 14.8%)

Declining percentages of people reporting better overall and mental health; more people with health or activity-based limitations and living with diabetes; but steep declines in teen smoking and higher rates of influenza immunization.

Democratic Engagement (↑ 14.3%)

Higher voter turnout, especially among younger and Indigenous voters; more women elected to Parliament; but deteriorating confidence in the federal government and satisfaction with the way democracy is playing out.

Time Use (↑ 7.8%)

Fewer people working long hours; more people with regular work hours and flexible schedules; longer commutes, less time with friends, and less sleep; but lower levels of time pressure.

Community Vitality (↑ 6.1%)

Stronger feelings of belonging to the community, but fewer close friends; less volunteering, but more help being provided to those in need; crime severity has declined significantly – but has begun to creep back up in the most recent years – yet fewer people feel safe walking alone after dark.

Environment (↑ 3.1%)

Soaring energy production and mineral extraction accompanied by higher greenhouse gas emissions and smog; more residents conserving at home, but still below national levels.

Leisure and Culture (↓ 10.7%)

Less time socializing with others, but higher rates of physical activity; fewer hours committed to volunteering for culture and recreation organizations; shorter vacation trips and reduced spending of household income on culture and recreation opportunities.

While positive changes in the economy, as reflected in GDP per capita, were much more consistent in both Canada and Saskatchewan, the more widely varying trends in the domains of the CIW indicate that wellbeing in Saskatchewan has been subject to other forces. Of course, each of these domains also tells its own complex story. Even modest improvements in overall wellbeing do not necessarily result in positive trends in all domains or their indicators. The story is explored further in the full report, available at www.saskwellbeing.ca.

Trends in the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and GDP (per capita) from 1994 to 2014.

