



# Just Facts

May 2018

Research and Statistics Division

## Child Support Cases, 2016-17

The Survey of Maintenance Enforcement Programs (SMEP) is an annual survey that collects statistical and descriptive information on child and spousal support payments and cases from maintenance enforcement programs (MEPs).<sup>1,2</sup>

MEPs exist in every province and territory to assist in the enforcement of child and spousal support payments. It should be noted that while this survey is considered a census of payments and support for those participating in the maintenance enforcement programs, only Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut participate in the SMEP. The survey does not represent support orders enrolled with those MEPs in non-participating provinces and territories, nor does it represent the many support orders that have not been enrolled with the MEPs.

### Enrollments decline for the sixth consecutive year

New enrollments continue to decline, dropping 0.9% from 2015-16 levels and 17.4% from 2011-12. The percentage of cases that have been closed has also decreased steadily over time, decreasing 26.3% from 2011-12 to 2016-17.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada. *Survey of Maintenance Enforcement Programs (SMEP), activity status, by type of beneficiary, interjurisdictional support order status and collection rates, annual (rate)*, CANSIM (database). (accessed: <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/COR-COR/COR-COR/objList?lang=eng&srcObjType=SDDS&srcObjId=3324&tgtObjType=ARRAY>)

<sup>2</sup> The total includes only the jurisdictions that report data to the Survey of Maintenance Enforcement Programs (SMEP). Nova Scotia, Alberta, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have reported data for every fiscal year since 2005-06. Prince Edward Island began reporting data in 2007-08, New Brunswick in 2008-09, Saskatchewan in 2009-10, Newfoundland and Labrador in 2010-11 and Nunavut in 2011-12. Data for Saskatchewan are not available for 2015-16. Data for Nunavut are not available for 2012-13 to 2015-16.

<sup>3</sup> Data from Saskatchewan was not available in the 2015-16 fiscal year and thus have been removed from previous years for comparison.





## Payment collection rates are at a six year low

There was an 81% collection rate<sup>4</sup> for all cases in 2016-17, which is three percent less than in 2015-16. The collection rate for all *active* cases was 79%, which is three percent less than in 2015-16. The highest collection rate for active cases was 87% in 2013-14.

The average age of a MEP's case load is as follows:

- 11.2% of the cases are new (cases enrolled for 1 year or less);
- 34.5% of the cases have been enrolled for greater than 1 year and up to five years; and
- 54.2% of the cases have been enrolled for greater than five years.

For the first time in six years, new cases have accounted for over eleven percent (11.2%) of MEP caseload.

## Total enforcement actions decreased<sup>5</sup>

In 2016-17, the total number of enforcement actions decreased by 13.9% to 304,746 as compared to the 353,892 enforcement actions taken in 2015-16. This represents a six year low in enforcement actions. The decrease is attributed almost exclusively to Alberta and New Brunswick. Alberta experienced a 16.5% decrease in total enforcement actions whereas New Brunswick experienced a 16.7% decrease. The Yukon<sup>6</sup> experienced a 29.6% increase for 2016-17.

## Increase in the proportion of cases with arrears owing

There was a slight increase in the number of cases with arrears owing as a proportion of the total number of cases enrolled; in 2015-16 there were 48.6% of cases having arrears as of March 31, whereas in 2016-17, the figure was 51.9%.

## Age breakdown of payors remains stable

The age groups of payors has remained relatively stable over the past five years, increasing or decreasing less than one percent each year. Payors in the 55 to 64 age group increased the most, by 2.5%, over the past five years. There was a corresponding 2.2% decrease of payors in the 25 to 34 age group during the same span.

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<sup>4</sup> The collection rate is calculated by dividing the amount of payment due in the fiscal year by the amount received. A collection rate of 75 would mean that 75 percent of what was due was received. The collection rate is calculated based on rounded values (to the nearest thousand). A collection rate of 0 percent does not necessarily mean no payment was received. Amounts due at the end of each month are aggregated to determine the annual amount due. Adjustments to the amount due transactions that occur after the reference month are not incorporated. Collection rates of 100 percent in this table include both rates of exactly 100 percent and those over 100 percent.

<sup>5</sup> Enforcement actions are those actions which a Maintenance Enforcement program (MEP) are able to take in order to try to obtain funds to satisfy the obligation. This may include warning letters, and administrative actions that try to get a payor to communicate with a MEP about their financial obligation. Enforcement actions differ by province and territory.

<sup>6</sup> Data from British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Nunavut are not available.





## Children remain the most common beneficiary

Children are the sole beneficiary in almost ninety percent (89.5%) of all active cases, decreasing slightly from 90.1% in 2015-16. The highest rate of children as the sole beneficiary was in 2011-12 (91.3%). The category indicating spouse only as a beneficiary has increased slightly for the sixth consecutive year from 4.1% in 2011-12 to 5.1% in 2016-17. Active cases with unknown beneficiary has increased for the third consecutive year; reaching 2.2% in 2016-17, up from 1.3% in 2013-14.

