



# The Aging of Rural BC

Over the past three decades, most rural BC communities have undergone a significant demographic shift.

From 1960 thru to the early 1980s, most of rural BC had a much younger demographic profile than the provincial average. The population of many rural communities was dominated by younger families with fewer seniors (e.g. 1986 Golden graph).

However, since the mid 1980s, there have been significant changes in rural BC – a decline in employment in the natural resource industries; a continued out-migration of youth; newer immigrants preferring to locate in urban communities; and population decline in some rural communities.

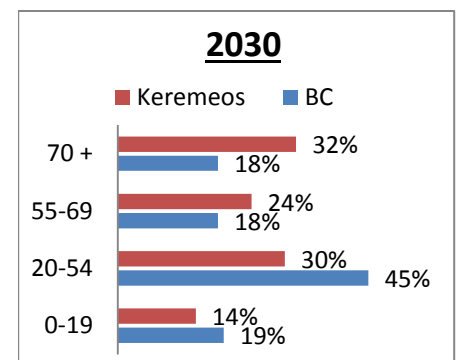
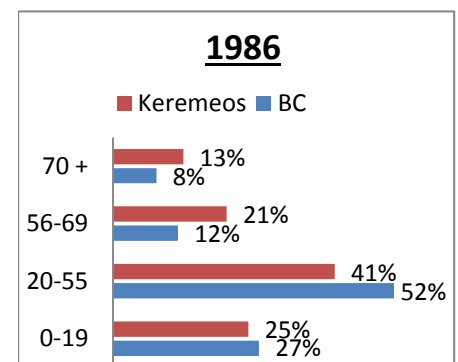
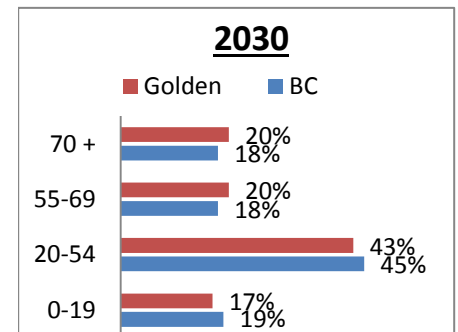
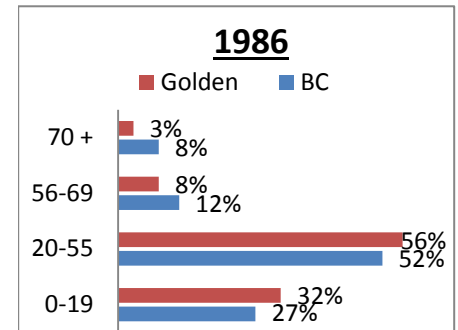
Indeed by 2013, of the 28 Local Health Areas (LHAs) in the southern interior only three – Fernie, Golden and Revelstoke – had percentages of their 56+ age population that were LESS than provincial average. Only rural First Nations communities are seeing a significant increase in their younger aged populations.

Population projections to 2030 see a continuation and strengthening of this trend – with the majority of southern interior LHAs predicted to have over 40% of their total populations over the age of 55. For rural communities like Keremeos that have always attracted retirees, the increase in the percentages of the population over the age of 70 are even more pronounced.

## 2030 Local Health Area Population Projections (BC Stats March 2015) - % of total LHA population age 55 +.

<b>Total Province</b>	<b>36%</b>	Kimberley	44%	Cranbrook	40%
S. Okanagan	56%	Penticton	44%	Merritt	39%
Keremeos	56%	Windermere	43%	Armstrong Sp	39%
Kootenay Lake	54%	Salmon Arm	43%	Lillooet	39%
Kettle Valley	53%	Enderby	43%	Castlegar	38%
Princeton	52%	N. Thompson	42%	Kamloops	37%
Grand Forks	51%	Trail	42%	Fernie	36%
Summerland	50%	Vernon	40%	Central Okan.	35%
Arrow Lakes	47%	Nelson	40%	Revelstoke	31%
Creston	45%	Golden	40%		

### Shifting Demographics in Rural BC



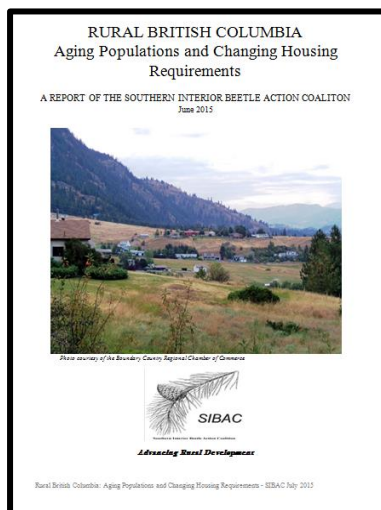
***“Seniors want to age independently as possible in their own homes and in their local communities. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) research shows that 85% of Canadians over 55 years old plan to remain in their present home for as long as possible, even if there are changes to their health.”***

***“In communities such as the lower mainland and major urban centres on Vancouver Island or in the Interior, the main focus is on the cost of housing. However, as you move out to the more rural parts of British Columbia, finding housing that is appropriate and available is a challenge irrespective of the costs.”***

Senior’s Housing in B.C. Affordable. Appropriate. Available. BC Senior’s Advocate Office. May 2015. Page 10

For smaller rural communities with stagnant economies, residents can face several challenges:

- Most rural communities are dominated by single family detached housing stock and there may be little housing inventory that is more suitable for seniors.
- If the housing market is also stagnant, it can be difficult for seniors to access equity from their major investment – their homes – to help pay for the additional services they need as they age.
- Ironically, while much of urban BC struggles with housing affordability – some rural communities have very affordable vacant homes with no buyers.



Recognizing these issues, since June 2014, SIBAC has led and funded research to examine rural housing issues and to identify resources that can help rural communities. The result of this preliminary research is a Summary Report and accompanying Research Resource Compendium that lists resources and cases studies for rural communities. Both documents are available on the SIBAC website at [www.sibacs.com/rural-development-projects](http://www.sibacs.com/rural-development-projects)

This SIBAC initiative has also involved supporting work in the community of Hedley to explore the interconnected issues of housing, seniors care and population retention.

SIBAC is now seeking additional funding partners in order to conduct more in-depth research and potential development of a Community Land Trust in Hedley.

SIBAC’s Board of Directors is comprised of representatives of the nine Regional Districts and six Tribal Councils in the southern interior and the CFDC of Central Interior First Nations. Committed to advancing rural development in the province SIBAC focusses its activities on three major areas (i) providing a southern interior rural perspective into government consultation processes (ii) encouraging the development of new rural policies and programs and (iii) developing and leading strategic rural development projects. For more information on SIBAC please visit our website and/or contact us. [www.sibacs.com](http://www.sibacs.com)