

**Key findings:**

- ◆ For the first time since at least 1997, Hamilton's population growth rate has now caught up with the provincial average, but remains lower than the average in the GTHA.
- ◆ Increase in population is largely due to increasing net migration from other Ontario communities, while immigration from other countries is declining sharply.
- ◆ All of Hamilton's age groups are on track to hitting growth targets, except for the youngest age group 0-19. This indicates there may be policy gaps that need to be filled to create the conditions where more children are raised in Hamilton so that it truly does become "The best place to raise a child."

**Introduction**

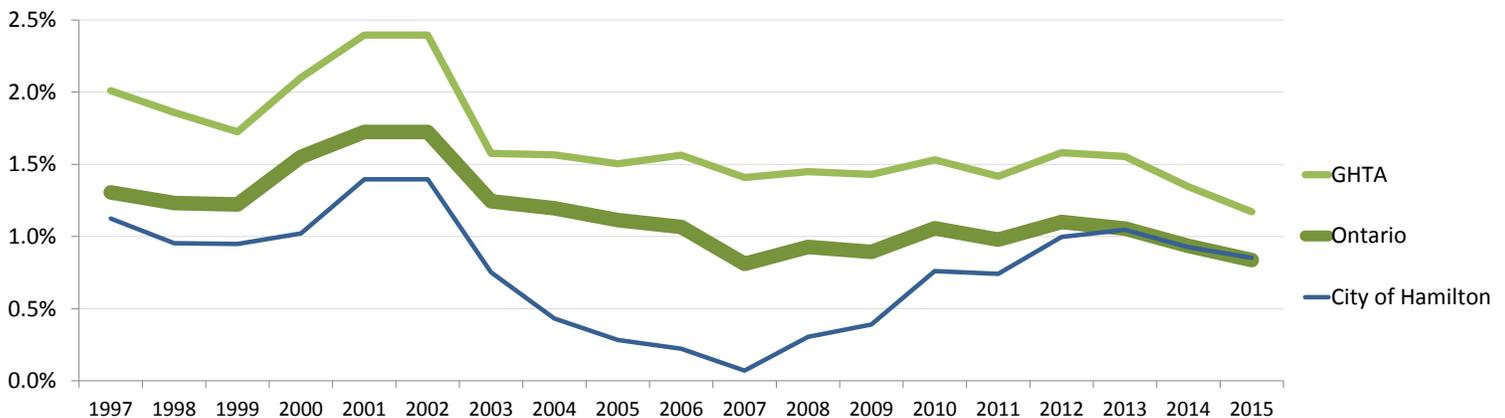
Issues 8 and 9 in this *Demographic Shifts* series highlighted Hamilton's aging population and large cohort of young adults. This bulletin investigates components of population growth since 1996 and Hamilton's recent population growth compared to population targets set by the province.

**Changes in Hamilton's population growth rate**

Even before the decline in the working age population group due to population aging, the City of Hamilton's population was growing at a much slower rate than neighbouring GTHA communities as well as the province. Chart 3 shows that Hamilton's lowest growth period since 1996 was in the 2006-2008 period. During this time, the average year over year population growth in Hamilton was just 0.2% per year, while across Ontario the average annual growth from 2006 to 2008 was 0.93% and in the GTHA it was 1.47%. This slower growth in Hamilton has been a decades long trend due to factors such as an older population with fewer children being born, lower rate of immigrants choosing to live in Hamilton, lower employment rates, combined with a relatively established, and more compact urban form with less sprawl than has been the case in GTHA communities such as Halton, Peel and York. (In previous generations suburban development was preferred by a large proportion of families with children so more chose to live in these new developments, which were somewhat less common in Hamilton than in other newer cities within the GTHA.)

In the last decade, however, Hamilton's growth has been increasing, and has now caught up to the provincial average (0.85% annual growth), but remains lower than average growth across the GTHA (1.17% annual growth in 2015). As illustrated in Issue 9 in this series, Hamilton's population growth rate only caught up to Ontario's growth once there was larger number of

**Chart 1. Population growth rates, City of Hamilton, Greater Toronto and Hamilton area, 1996-2015 (Statistics Canada, Estimates of Population)**

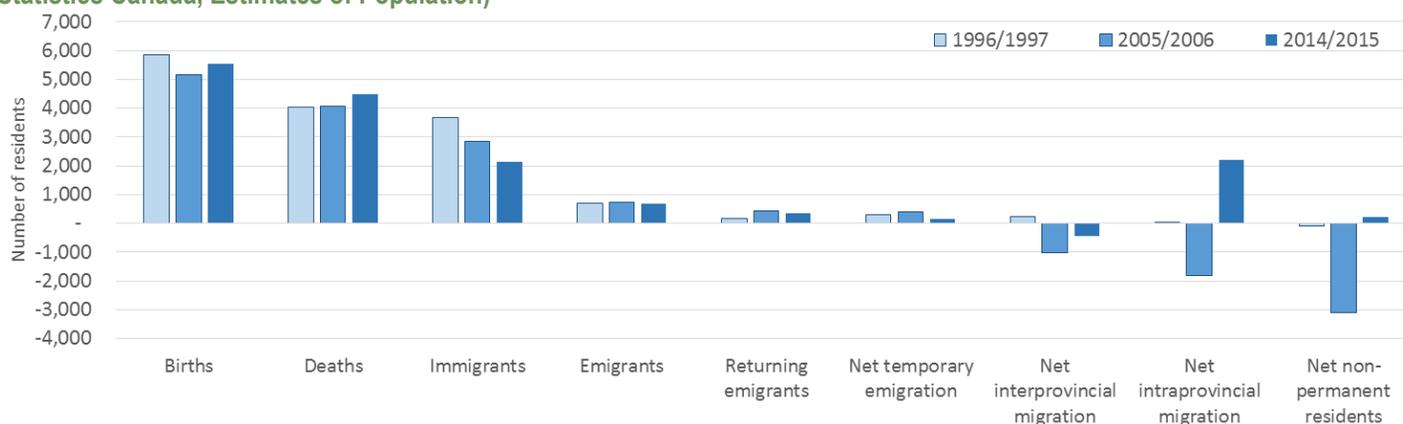


## Components of population growth

Chart 2 shows that the largest component of population change that is significantly increasing Hamilton's growth is an influx of residents from within Ontario and fewer Hamilton residents moving to other communities in Ontario (which both contribute to net intraprovincial migration). In 2014/2015, Hamilton had a net gain over 2,000 Ontarians from other communities, compared to a loss nearly as large in 2005/2006. The influx of residents from other countries on the other hand is decreasing steadily, from about 3,800 immigrants in 1996/1997 to about 2,000 in 2014/2015. This decreasing trend in the immigrant population is present across Ontario, as other provinces have been more successful in attracting immigrants in the recent decades. This trend is amplified in Hamilton, however, as Hamilton experienced a 42% drop in new immigrants for between 1996/1997 and 2014/2015, higher than the 25% drop in new immigrants province-wide during that time.

This year's influx of Syrian refugees to communities across Canada, including Hamilton, will help slow the decline in new immigrants locally, if this refugee population is in addition to the usual annual average number of refugees. The over 500 Syrian children who have arrived in Hamilton this year are boosting enrolment at local schools, and if followed by a continued increase in immigrant children to Hamilton, these children will help keep some schools open that otherwise will have to be closed due provincial policies for schools with low enrolment.

**Chart 2. Components of population growth and decline, City of Hamilton 1996/1997, 2005/2006 and 2014/15**  
(Statistics Canada, Estimates of Population)



The government of Ontario has set population growth targets for all communities in the GHTA as part of its *Places to Grow Act*, which focuses on limiting urban sprawl and increasing growth in older established communities such as Hamilton. Chart 3 illustrates that Hamilton is nearly achieving the target growth for older adults (60 year and over) and young adults (20-40 years of age) and is over the province's target for adults aged 40-59. Hamilton, however, is currently on track to miss its target for children, as the 0-19 year old age group is about 5% lower than a trendline based on the province's 2021 target for that age group (which means about 6,500 fewer residents aged 0-19, including about 2,000 fewer children aged 0-4 in 2015 than expected). The city's recently modified its vision to be "The best place to raise a child and age successfully." This data indicates there may policy gaps that need to be filled to create the conditions where more children are raised in Hamilton.

**Chart 3. Actual population (2001-2015) and *Places to Grow Act* growth targets (2011-2031), by selected age groups, City of Hamilton** (Statistics Canada, Estimates of Population and Hemson Consulting, Inc.)

