

# Investment Insights

## Lessons of the Past: Higher for Longer

Summer 2024

*"What's past is prologue." — William Shakespeare, The Tempest*

With expectations for multiple interest rate cuts to start the year, why have the central banks been slow to move? On June 5, the Bank of Canada became the first Group of Seven central bank to reduce its policy rate, by a quarter-percentage point. However, the central banks have been proceeding cautiously with their monetary policy decisions. Let's not forget that they faced significant criticism in 2021 for not acting swiftly to contain rising inflation, suggesting it was transient. Additionally, their caution has been influenced by the looming spectre of the 1970s.

Just how severe was inflation in the 70s? In an era of bell bottoms and a Beatles' breakup, it was a decade marred by persistently high inflation, high unemployment and low growth, or stagflation. During this time, Canada grappled with an average inflation rate of around 8 percent, with inflation peaking two times: 11 percent in 1974 and almost 13 percent in 1981. In the U.S., inflation would hit 14 percent by 1980. It was only when then-Fed Chair Paul Volcker aggressively raised the federal funds rate to 20 percent by 1981 that inflation would be contained, but this pushed the U.S. into severe recession. Canada followed suit by hiking rates to a whopping 21 percent. At that time, five-year fixed mortgage rates reached a high of 21.5 percent; a stark contrast to today's rates of around 6 percent.

Central bankers are keen to avoid a repeat of the 1970s. Some suggest that the underlying drivers of inflation back in the 70s share similarities to today. Oil price shocks and energy supply shortages played a major role back then, compounded by the expansive fiscal and monetary policies of the 1960s and early 70s aimed at boosting employment. When inflation peaked in 2022, many attributed it to pandemic-induced supply chain disruptions, along with overly expansionary fiscal and monetary policies in response to the pandemic. Whether or not we agree on the drivers, one thing is certain: a slow response in the 70s led to higher interest rates and a more pronounced economic slowdown.

Today, labour markets remain resilient amid easing inflation, a comforting development. Traditionally, inflation and unemployment exhibit an inverse relationship, observed by the economic theory known as the "Phillips curve." Instances of significant central bank-induced disinflation often coincide with elevated unemployment rates and recession.<sup>1</sup> While the psychological toll of inflation is undeniable — most of us have felt the pain with the rising costs of essentials like groceries — the impact of increased unemployment may be more profound. Multiple studies have shown that higher unemployment depresses our well-being more than inflation; with one study suggesting nearly double the impact and another proposing up to five times as much.<sup>2</sup>

Achieving a "soft landing" that maintains both labour and price stability is, therefore, enviable — and still appears attainable. However, the central banks remain cautious in their rate adjustments, mindful of the past. Just as with many aspects of investing, patience may continue to be needed as we navigate the ongoing battle against inflation.

1. <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/fed-needs-recession-win-inflation-fight-study-shows-2023-02-24/>; 2. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/inflation-and-unemployment-both-make-you-miserable-but-maybe-not-equally-11668744274>

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### To Our Clients:

Despite positive equity market strides including robust market breadth, opinions on the near-term outlook remain varied. One market observer recently noted that we find ourselves in a 'liminal space' — a transition zone where economic conditions are neither terrible nor great. It's a fair observation and one that may explain why financial market narratives appear to keep shifting. With summer's arrival, it's an opportune time to take a break from the headlines. Short-term uncertainties will always be with us; yet, most of us are investing for the longer term and not based on what tomorrow may or may not bring.

One of our roles is to simplify your financial life, tending to your wealth management so you can step back from the noise. Don't hesitate to call if we can be of assistance with any investment matters, but know that we are here taking care of things for you. Enjoy the summer.

**Victor, Colleen, Eva and Nicole**

# Timing CPP/QPP Benefits: Three Things You May Not Know

Here are three things that may impact the timing decision.

Lately, there's been considerable media attention advocating for the delay of Canada/Quebec Pension Plan (CPP/QPP) benefits, likely because the vast majority take benefits early. Actuarial studies continue to show that many are better off delaying since the break-even age\* falls below our average life expectancy. Living beyond this age means that waiting will yield a larger total lifetime payment. Recall that starting CPP/QPP before age 65 (as early as age 60) decreases payments by 0.6 percent per month;\*\*\* yet, delaying beyond 65 increases payments by 0.7 percent per month, up to 42 percent (age 70) for CPP and, now, 58.8 percent (age 72) for QPP.

If you've yet to make the decision, here are three things you may not know:

**1. Retiring early — or late — can impact the benefit amount.** Consider the situation in which an individual works past age 65 and also delays the benefit. This can lead to a potentially greater benefit. For both CPP and QPP, since lower-earning years tend to be at younger ages when first starting a career, by extending your working years past age 65, you may add higher-earning years to the calculation and increase the benefit. For the CPP, benefits are generally calculated using the best 40 years of income, usually between ages 18 and 65, but you may be able to use those earnings to replace any periods of low earnings before age 65. The good news? It doesn't work the other way: Low-earning years past age 65 will have no effect on the CPP benefit calculation. However, for both CPP and QPP, if you retire before 65 and wait to take benefits, the zero-earnings years have the potential to negatively impact the benefit (i.e., retiring at age 60 and waiting to collect CPP/QPP at age 65 can potentially add five zero-earning years to the calculation of the benefit).

## 2. Survivor benefits may be less than anticipated.

CPP/QPP survivor benefits are often misunderstood.

Many assume they are more generous than they

actually are, which can leave a retirement income/cash flow shortfall for a surviving spouse. Consider a situation in which both spouses collect maximum CPP benefits, collectively providing almost \$33,000 in annual retirement, based on a monthly CPP of \$1,364.60 (2024). If one spouse passes away, annual benefits of over \$16,000 will be lost. This is because the most that can be paid to a surviving spouse eligible for both CPP and survivor benefits is the maximum retirement pension. If the spouse was the only one eligible for CPP and dies after taking their CPP at age 65, the surviving spouse may be eligible for up to 60 percent of the deceased's benefits. How much is received depends on a number of factors, including their age and whether they're taking their benefits before or after age 65.

**3. You can change your mind, within limits.** If you start benefits and change your mind, you can cancel CPP within 12 months of its start, or 6 months for QPP. The cancellation must be in writing to Service Canada/Retraite Québec and you must pay back the benefits received.

\*The age at which total benefits received by delaying payments exceed total benefits received by starting payments earlier. \*\*\*Or 0.5 percent for some small QPP amounts.



**CPP Timing Tool:** If you have yet to take benefits, this tool may help you frame the timing decision: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/investing/personal-finance/tools/cpp-benefits/>

## In Brief: Budget 2024 — Key Changes Impacting Investors

In the spring, the Federal government released its budget. There were no changes to personal or corporate income tax rates, but here are five notable changes for investors.\*

**1. Capital gains inclusion rate** — The budget proposes\* to increase the capital gains inclusion rate from 50 percent to 66.67 percent for corporations and trusts and on the portion of capital gains realized that exceeds a threshold of \$250,000 per year for individuals, for capital gains realized on or after June 25, 2024.

**2. Lifetime capital gains exemption (LCGE)** — The budget proposes to increase the LCGE from \$1,016,836 to \$1,250,000 for dispositions on or after June 25, 2024, with this indexed to inflation beginning in 2026.

**3. Canadian entrepreneur's incentive** — This new incentive proposes to reduce the prevailing capital gains inclusion rate by 50 percent on the disposition of qualifying shares by an eligible individual on up to \$2 million of lifetime capital gains, subject to conditions. The limit will be phased in by \$200,000 per year, beginning in 2025 and reaching \$2 million by 2034.

**4. Alternative minimum tax (AMT)** — The AMT is a "parallel tax" calculation that prevents high-income earners and some trusts from

paying little or no tax as a result of certain tax deductions and credits. The budget further amends the AMT rules, notably those relating to donations to now allow individuals to claim 80 percent of the charitable donation tax credit when calculating the AMT, instead of the previously proposed 50 percent. Employee ownership trusts would be fully exempt from the AMT.

**5. Employee ownership trusts (EOT)** — An EOT is a trust that holds shares of qualifying businesses for the benefit of employees to support succession planning and promote employee ownership of small businesses. The budget further clarifies the conditions required to meet the \$10 million capital gains exemption on the sale of shares to an EOT. Most notably, the exemption can be shared among multiple individuals and the exemption applies to qualifying dispositions of shares that occur between January 1, 2024, and December 31, 2026.

For more information, please see: <https://budget.canada.ca/>

\*At the time of writing, budget legislation has not been enacted.



# Reducing the Bite: An Increasing Capital Gains Inclusion Rate

With an increase to the capital gains inclusion rate, are there ways to manage a potentially greater tax bite?\*

Since late 2000, 50 percent (1/2) of realized capital gains have been subject to tax. As of June 25, 2024, the inclusion rate will increase\* to 66.67 percent (2/3) for corporations and trusts, and on the portion of capital gains realized in the year that exceed \$250,000 for individuals. The table shows the impact on a capital gain of \$500,000 for an individual with no other gains. Are there ways to manage the potential tax bite? Here are a handful of ideas:

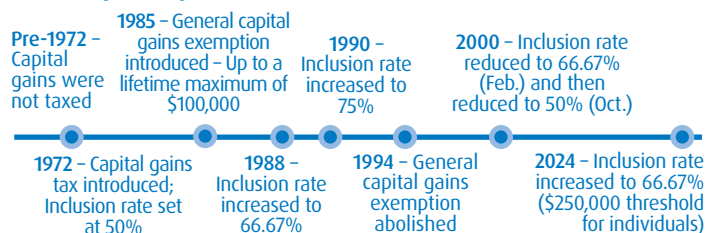
**Weigh the benefits of a lower inclusion rate** — Tax deferral is commonly viewed as a way to create greater future returns since funds that might otherwise go to paying tax can remain invested for longer-term growth. However, individuals should evaluate the possibility of accelerated taxation at a lower rate versus deferred taxation at higher rates: A higher inclusion rate applies to gains over \$250,000. As an example, based on a capital gain of \$100,000 and a marginal tax rate of 48 percent, an investor would save \$8,000 in taxes by realizing a gain at the lower inclusion rate. Yet, this comes at the cost of “pre-paying” \$24,000 in capital gains taxes today. If this amount was invested with a return of 6 percent per year, it would take seven years of tax-deferred growth, based on a 2/3 inclusion rate, to beat the \$8,000 in tax savings.

**Spread gains over multiple years** — If possible, consider realizing gains over multiple years to take advantage of a lower inclusion rate under the \$250,000 threshold versus a larger realized gain in a single year.

**Crystallize gains** — Deliberately selling and rebuying stocks to trigger a capital gain (“crystallizing”) can decrease book value over time. This strategy, often used in years when an investor is in a lower tax bracket, may help to capitalize on the lower inclusion rate each year.

**Plan to cover increased tax liabilities** — Plan ahead for an increased tax liability. The use of insurance or other planning techniques may be

## A History of Capital Gains Tax in Canada



Source: “A Primer on Capital Gains Taxes in Canada,” CBC, 10/18/2000.

considered to cover the eventual higher tax liability, such as for the transfer of a family property.

**Donate securities** — Assuming the new rules apply to the deemed disposition of assets at death,\* for estate planning if you are considering donating to a registered Canadian charity, consider the use of publicly-listed securities as any accrued capital gain is excluded from taxable income and a donation receipt equal to the value of the donated securities is received.\*\*

**Business owners** — Evaluate whether certain assets should be held in the corporation or owned personally. For corporations, there is no \$250,000 threshold; realized capital gains are taxable at the 2/3 inclusion rate. The use of corporate-owned insurance or an Individual Pension Plan may be considerations for a business’ tax strategy. Plan ahead to use deductions, such as the lifetime capital gains exemption proposed to increase to \$1.25M, to reduce the taxes payable on the disposition of qualified shares.

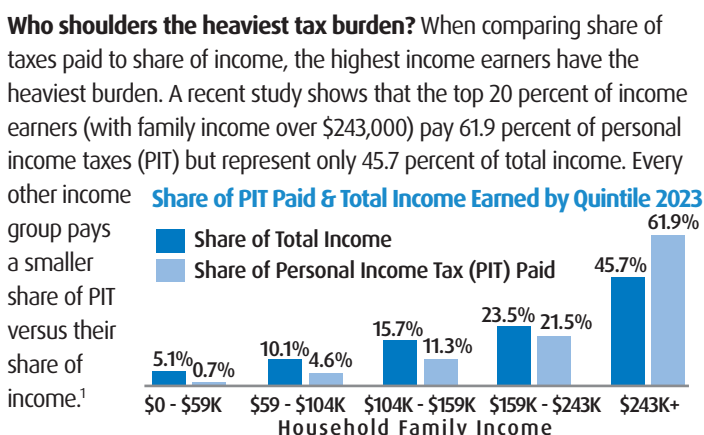
As always, please seek advice from a tax expert regarding your situation.  
\*At the time of writing, legislation has not been enacted.  
\*\*If managing over a lifetime, this applies to individuals not affected by the AMT.

Province	Tax Rate on Capital Gain*		Additional Tax
	1/2 Inclusion	2/3 Inclusion	
BC	26.75%	35.67%	\$22,292
AB	24.00%	32.00%	\$20,000
SK	23.75%	31.67%	\$19,792
MB	25.20%	33.60%	\$21,000
ON	26.76%	35.69%	\$22,304
QC	26.66%	35.54%	\$22,213
NB	26.25%	35.00%	\$21,875
NS	27.00%	36.00%	\$22,500
PEI	25.88%	34.50%	\$21,563
NL/LB	27.40%	36.53%	\$22,833

\*For individuals based on top marginal tax rates, 01/01/24.

## Two Graphics: Perspectives on the Taxes We Pay

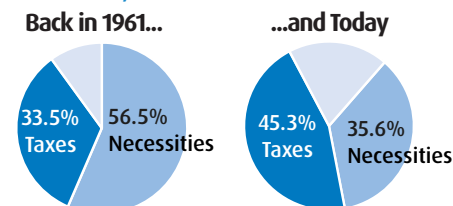
If it feels like you’re paying more tax, you may not be mistaken. Here are two graphics that provide insight on the taxes we pay.



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**How has our tax burden changed over time?** According to the *Canadian Consumer Tax Index*, around 45.3 percent of family income goes to pay taxes today. Since 1961, this has increased by 2,778 percent, outpacing the 863 percent rise in the Consumer Price Index.<sup>2</sup> Despite recent inflationary pressures, it may be surprising to note that over the past six decades, the portion of income allocated to necessities — housing, clothing and food — has decreased by over 20 percentage points. This has resulted in greater disposable income despite a higher tax burden.

### Average Canadian Family’s Tax Burden vs. Necessities, 1961 and 2022



1. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/studies/measuring-progressivity-in-canadas-tax-system-2023>; 2. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/studies/taxes-versus-necessities-of-life-canadian-consumer-tax-index-2023-edition>

# Oh, Canada! We've Got a Productivity Problem

"Why isn't Canada an economic giant?" This was the headline of a *Financial Times* article highlighting our "vast potential," but suggesting we "underperform on the global stage."

It's a valid perspective. With the second-largest land mass globally and an abundance of resources, including oil and natural gas, minerals critical to the green energy transition and a strong agricultural industry, "by any measure, Canada's geography suggests it could be an economic powerhouse." We also boast a highly educated population and a strong standard of living. Yet, despite these advantages, Canada has had little productivity growth over recent decades, falling second to last among G7 nations, ahead of only Italy. Canadian workers produce only 70 percent of our U.S. counterparts' output, based on 2022 figures.<sup>1</sup>

Productivity is crucial for economic growth, as reflected in Statistics Canada's latest report of real GDP per capita, now lagging seven percent below its long-term trend. The Bank of Canada suggests three elements are key to driving productivity: i) capital intensity, including access to better machinery and new technologies to improve efficiency and output; ii) labour composition, improving skills and training; and iii) multi-factor productivity, using capital and labour more efficiently.<sup>2</sup>

How can we improve our productivity problem? An op-ed in *The Globe & Mail* provides some perspectives:<sup>3</sup>

- **Encouraging capital investment**, including in machinery and equipment, as well as intellectual property and skills training for workers to drive output. This may be fostered by lowering barriers to capital formation, such as tax rates.
- **Increasing competition by loosening restrictions**, including foreign investment controls, interprovincial trade barriers, foreign entry constraints and protectionism, as examples.
- **Reassessing current government spending**, including evaluating subsidies for industries, research and innovation that have not contributed to growth.
- **Increasing the supply of labour**. Immigration has helped, as have changing demographics that have increased the participation of women over recent decades. However, when normalizing labour participation as a proportion of the total population, employment rates have dropped from 75 percent to around 61 percent, a similar level to 1988.

## Lessons from the Past: From (Almost) Worst to First

Let's not forget that it was just 30 years ago when Canada was referred to as "an honorary member of the Third World." At that time, we had the second worst fiscal position of the G7 countries, suffering from a "vicious debt circle" — ironically, similar to today, only Italy was worse. Yet, 1994 would be the turning point. Then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien and Finance Minister Paul Martin orchestrated one of the most dramatic fiscal turnarounds in history, with the greatest reduction in government spending since post-WWII. Canadian debt shrank from 68 percent of GDP in 1995/96 to 29 percent by 2008/09 and the budget was in the black for 11 consecutive years. Our fiscal position became the best of the G7. While it wasn't without significant sacrifice that the deficit was finally controlled, Canada notably did not fall into recession during this time. In fact, "after wrestling the deficit to the ground," it was considered "the payoff decade" and Canada outperformed the rest of the G7 in growth, job creation and inward investment.<sup>4</sup>

History is a reminder that profound change is possible, perhaps a lesson relevant to the situation in which we find ourselves today: leadership from the top can impart change. Now it's time to get started.

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/67e97cc4-6ab0-4e78-b4a8-7c97b8e52ada>; 2. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/2024/03/productivity-problem/>; 3. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-what-might-a-serious-growth-agenda-look-like-more-labour-more-capital/>; 4. <https://financialpost.com/uncategorized/lessons-from-canadas-basket-case-moment>



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