has been the reduction in the mortality of infants and children. Between 1951 and 1975, death rates for infants and for children under five years of age dropped by more than 60% (Table 4.39). Rates for the 5-14 age group also declined. However, rates for boys and young men from 15 to 24 were actually higher than in 1951. Death rates for males over 25 were appreciably lower in 1975 than in 1951, except for men of 65-74 years, for whom there was little change. Rates for females of all ages declined substantially between 1951 and 1975.

Sharp reductions in male infant and child mortality and substantial declines in the female rates for all younger age groups have tended to raise the average age at death. Over the 1966-75 period the average for males rose 1.8 years from 62.0 to 63.8, while that for females advanced 3.5 years, from 65.9 to 69.4. The male median age at death remained unchanged at about 68.5, but the gain for females was 1.5 years, from 73.5 to 75.0. Thus half the females who died in 1975 were more than 75.0 years old.

Causes of death. Table 4.41 gives details of the 1975 Canadian deaths and death rates based on 50 causes as given in the international abbreviated list (international classification of diseases, 8th revision).

The proportion of older people in the population has been rising in recent years. Consequently, cancer and cardiovascular diseases account for a larger proportion of all deaths than formerly. On the other hand, deaths of infants, children and young adults from such diseases as pneumonia and tuberculosis have sharply declined.

Table 4.42 shows that the leading causes of infant mortality are radically different from the main causes of death at later periods. Accidents are the primary cause of death for males between one and 44 years of age. The majority of deaths among older males are due either to cardiovascular diseases or to cancer.

Accidents are also the primary cause of mortality among girls, with cancer being the leading cause of death for young and middle-aged women. Cardiovascular diseases and cancer are the leading causes of death for elderly women.

4.7.2 Infant mortality

Table 4.43 shows that mortality rates for both male and female infants (under one year of age) have been reduced by more than 60% since 1951. The improvement is due to many factors including better prenatal and postnatal care, improved sanitation, the use of antibiotics and higher living standards. In recent years, also, older women (a high-risk group) have been having fewer babies.

The 1975 provincial mortality rates for infants of both sexes vary substantially among the provinces and territories with the rates for the Northwest Territories being substantially higher. The national death rate for all infants was 14.3, the lowest on record (Table 4.43).

4.7.3 Life expectancy

Life tables are measures of life expectancy compiled from the death rates prevailing over a period. They assume that a given group of people (usually 100,000) are born simultaneously in a particular year and continue to be subject all their lives to the death rates prevailing in that year, or perhaps to the average death rates for a three-year period centred around that year. The expected deaths in the group are calculated (in the case of a complete life table) for the first year of life, second year of life, and the diminishing group is followed for 100 or more years until it has been virtually eliminated. Life expectancy at birth is calculated for the entire group and, subsequently, remaining life expectancy is calculated for the survivors at one year and subsequent years. It should be noted that the assumptions of such a life table are never fulfilled in practice and that the hypothetical groups in life tables do not represent any actual population. Usually, the persons in an actual group born in the life-table year will have a higher life expectancy than those in the life-table group because during their lifetimes public health conditions will presumably improve and standards of medical care will also presumably advance.

Seven official sets of life tables were published, based on deaths in the three-year period around each of the censuses of 1931, 1941, 1951, 1956, 1961, 1966 and 1971. The Canadian life-table values for the 1971 period are given for selected ages in Table