



It's 2021: Do you know what your tax rate is?

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Tax rates can vary with differences in government legislation and your level and type of income. Do you know what your tax rate will be in 2021? This report will help you to understand how your income is taxed and why the “advertised” tax rate isn’t always what you end up paying.

Different tax rates

Canadian individuals pay taxes at graduated rates, meaning that your rate of tax gets progressively higher as your taxable income increases. Different tax rates apply based on federal and provincial and territorial rules.

Graduated federal tax rates

Figure 1 shows the federal tax rates that apply at various levels of taxable income for 2021.

Figure 1: Federal tax rates at varying levels of taxable income in 2021

Taxable income	2021
≤ \$49,020	15.0%
> \$49,020 and ≤ \$98,040	20.5%
> \$98,040 and ≤ \$151,978	26.0%
> \$151,978 and ≤ \$216,511	29.0%
> \$216,511	33.0%

For example, on the first \$49,020 of taxable income, you would pay federal tax at a rate of 15%. In contrast, taxable income exceeding \$216,511 is taxed at 33%.

Income inclusions, deductions and credits

While graduated tax rates are applied to “taxable income,” not all income is included and certain amounts may be deducted in determining taxable income, thereby reducing the base to which marginal tax rates are applied.

Capital gains are an example of income that is only partially taxed. Unlike interest income that is fully included in taxable income, only 50% of capital gains (less capital losses) are included. The remaining 50% is excluded from income and no tax is paid on this excluded half of net capital gains.

For example, let’s say you realized net capital gains of \$10,000 from the sale of shares. Only half of this amount (\$5,000) would be taxed. If instead you earned interest income of \$10,000, you would pay tax on the entire amount.

Common deductions that you may subtract from your total income, thereby decreasing your taxable income, include investment management fees for non-registered accounts, contributions to a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP), and qualifying child care expenses.

In contrast to deductions, tax credits directly reduce the tax you pay after marginal tax rates have been applied to your taxable income. With tax credits, a fixed rate is applied to eligible amounts and the resultant credit amount offsets taxes payable. Figure 2 shows that when the federal tax credit rate of 15% is applied to a \$1,000 amount, \$150 of tax savings results.

Common federal non-refundable tax credits include the basic personal amount, the amount for a spouse or common-law partner, medical expenses and charitable donations.

A non-refundable tax credit is also available to investors who receive dividends from Canadian corporations, to recognize the fact that tax was already paid on the income by the corporation. "Eligible dividends" typically come from corporate income that was taxed at relatively high rates (such as general income) while non-eligible dividends generally come from corporate income that was taxed at lower rates (such as income that's eligible for the small business deduction).

Eligible dividends are most commonly received from Canadian publicly-traded companies or mutual funds that hold Canadian dividend-paying equities. An enhanced dividend tax credit is available to an individual who receives eligible dividends to compensate for the higher rate of tax that was paid in the corporation.

Non-eligible dividends would typically be received from a private Canadian corporation that paid tax on its corporate income at the lower, small business rate. Because tax is paid at a lower rate in the corporation, a lower dividend tax credit is available to an individual for non-eligible dividends.

Let's look at an example that shows how a tax deduction yields tax savings at the marginal tax rate that varies with your income level, while a tax credit yields tax savings at a fixed rate. Suppose you have total income of \$55,000 and claim either a \$1,000 deduction (for example, an RRSP contribution) or claim a federal non-refundable credit for \$1,000 (for example, CPP contributions). Figure 2 shows how deductions and credits reduce the tax that you pay.

The amount of the deduction is subtracted from income, so that this amount of income is not taxed. In Figure 2, a \$1,000 tax deduction yields \$205 of tax savings, calculated as the \$1,000 deduction multiplied by the marginal tax rate that would have applied to the income (20.5%). Consequently, a deduction yields tax savings at your marginal tax rate.

Figure 2: Value of a \$1,000 federal tax deduction and tax credit

Description	No deduction or credit	Tax deduction	Tax credit
Total income	55,000	55,000	55,000
Deductions (for example, RRSP deduction)	n/a	(1,000)	n/a
Taxable income	55,000	54,000	55,000
Federal tax @ 15% on first \$49,020	(7,353)	(73,53)	(7,353)
Federal tax @ 20.5% on remaining income	(1,226)	(1,021)	(1,226)
Total federal tax payable before credits	(8,579)	(8,374)	(8,579)
Federal tax credit (\$1,000 @ 15%) (for example CPP premiums)	n/a	n/a	150
Total federal tax payable	(8,579)	(7,375)	(8,429)
Value of deduction / credit		205	150

On the other hand the \$1,000 of CPP contributions generates a federal non-refundable credit of 15%, yielding a federal tax savings of only \$150. When you add provincial tax savings to the federal savings above, the total tax savings can range from about 20% for the combined credits to more than 50% for a deduction, depending on the province of residence.

Marginal tax rate

Your marginal tax rate is the amount of tax you would pay on an additional dollar of income. In addition to graduated federal tax rates shown in Figure 1, provincial and territorial taxes are also graduated and applied to your taxable income before allowing for credits.

Figure 3 shows the combined federal and provincial and territorial marginal tax rates that apply to various types of income in 2021 for an individual with \$50,000, \$100,000 or \$250,000 of taxable income, allowing for a 50% inclusion of capital gains and the dividend tax credit on eligible dividends.

Figure 3: Combined federal / provincial and territorial marginal tax rates with \$50,000, \$100,000 or \$250,000 of ordinary income, capital gains or eligible dividends in 2021.

Province or territory	\$50,000 ordinary income	\$50,000 capital gains	\$50,000 eligible dividends	\$100,000 ordinary income	\$100,000 capital gains	\$100,000 eligible dividends	\$250,000 ordinary income	\$250,000 capital gains	\$250,000 eligible dividends
AB	30.50%	15.25%	10.16%	36.00%	18.00%	17.75%	47.00%	23.50%	32.93%
BC	28.20%	14.10%	1.63%	38.29%	19.15%	15.55%	53.50%	26.75%	36.54%
MB	33.25%	16.63%	14.12%	43.40%	21.70%	28.12%	50.40%	25.20%	37.78%
NB	35.32%	17.66%	8.69%	42.52%	21.26%	18.63%	53.30%	26.65%	33.51%
NL	35.00%	17.50%	20.12%	41.80%	20.90%	29.50%	51.30%	25.65%	42.61%
NS	35.98%	17.99%	16.71%	43.50%	21.75%	27.09%	54.00%	27.00%	41.58%
NT	29.10%	14.55%	3.56%	38.20%	19.10%	16.12%	47.05%	23.53%	28.33%
NU	27.50%	13.75%	9.62%	35.00%	17.50%	19.97%	44.50%	22.25%	33.08%
ON	29.65%	14.83%	6.39%	43.41%	21.70%	25.38%	53.53%	26.76%	39.34%
PE	34.30%	17.15%	12.12%	44.37%	22.19%	24.56%	51.37%	25.69%	34.22%
QU	37.12%	18.56%	17.77%	45.71%	22.86%	29.63%	53.31%	26.65%	40.11%
SK	33.00%	16.50%	9.63%	38.50%	19.25%	17.22%	47.50%	23.75%	29.64%
YK	29.50%	14.75%	3.40%	36.90%	18.45%	13.61%	45.80%	22.90%	25.89%

Source: Tax Templates Inc., December 2020¹

For example, Figure 3 shows that in Alberta in 2021, the marginal tax rate for an individual who earns \$50,000 of ordinary income is 30.50% (20.50% federal rate plus a 10.00% Alberta provincial tax rate). Since only 50% of capital gains are included in taxable income, the marginal tax rate for capital gains is 15.25%, or 50% of the marginal tax rate for ordinary income. And, due to the dividend tax credit, the marginal tax rate for eligible dividends is just 10.16%.

¹ This table assumes that all income up to the bracket calculation is other income, and the marginal rates include federal and provincial/territorial taxes, and surtaxes. The amounts also include the basic personal amounts, dividend tax credits, and provincial tax rate reductions (where applicable).

Average tax rate

The average tax rate is simply calculated as the amount of tax you pay, divided by your total income. So, for the same individual in Alberta who earns \$50,000 of ordinary income, the combined federal and provincial tax liability in 2021 would be \$8,546, allowing for only the basic personal credit. This results in an average tax rate of 17.09% ($\$8,546 / \$50,000$) – significantly below the 30.50% marginal rate.

Figure 4 compares the marginal and average tax rates for various levels of ordinary income across the provinces and territories in 2021.

Figure 4: Marginal and average tax rates² with \$50,000, \$100,000 or \$250,000 of ordinary income in 2021

Province or territory	\$50,000 Marginal Tax Rate	\$50,000 Average Tax Rate	\$100,000 Marginal Tax Rate	\$100,000 Average Tax Rate	\$250,000 Marginal Tax Rate	\$250,000 Average Tax Rate
AB	30.50%	17.09%	36.00%	23.90%	47.00%	34.44%
BC	28.20%	15.32%	38.29%	22.36%	53.50%	36.16%
MB	33.25%	20.25%	43.40%	28.12%	50.40%	39.08%
NB	35.32%	19.23%	42.52%	27.60%	53.30%	39.77%
NL	35.00%	19.39%	41.80%	27.61%	51.30%	38.84%
NS	35.98%	20.52%	43.50%	28.98%	54.00%	40.89%
NT	29.10%	15.37%	38.20%	22.75%	47.05%	34.60%
NU	27.50%	13.84%	35.00%	20.91%	44.50%	32.14%
ON	29.65%	16.52%	43.41%	24.20%	53.53%	38.39%
PE	34.30%	20.15%	44.37%	28.38%	51.37%	39.77%
QU	37.12%	19.93%	45.71%	29.01%	53.31%	41.51%
SK	33.00%	18.23%	38.50%	25.72%	47.50%	36.14%
YK	29.50%	15.65%	36.90%	22.72%	45.80%	33.80%

Source: *Tax Templates Inc.*, December 2020

Let's take a look at three examples³ and review how the type of income you earn can have a significant impact on your marginal and average tax rates.

Example 1

Angelica lives in B.C. and earns \$50,000 of employment income in 2021. She will pay \$7,471 in tax, yielding an average tax rate of 14.9% ($\$7,471 / \$50,000$). Her marginal tax rate would be 28.2% on each additional dollar of ordinary income. On capital gains, her marginal tax rate would be half that or 14.1% while on Canadian eligible dividend income, her marginal tax rate would be a mere 1.6%.

² Assuming only the basic personal amount and applicable low-income rate reductions are claimed.

³ Calculations in the examples were prepared by CIBC using worksheets from *Tax Templates Inc.* It is assumed the basic personal amount, Canada employment amount, tuition credit and donation credit are claimed when available. The GST/HST credit and contributions to the Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance program have not been considered.

Example 2

Eliza lives in Ontario and earns \$50,000 of investment income in 2021, comprised of \$10,000 of interest income, \$20,000 of realized (gross) capital gains and \$20,000 of Canadian eligible dividends. Her total tax bill would be \$923⁴ and her average tax rate only 1.8% (\$923 / \$50,000). The reason for such a low effective rate stems primarily from the dividend tax credit, which can be applied not only against the tax generated on the dividend, but also against some of the tax generated on the capital gains and interest.

Example 3

Peggy lives in Manitoba and earns \$50,000 of employment income, contributes \$5,000 to an RRSP and has \$5,000 of tuition credit amount carryforward from when she was a student. She makes \$1,200 in charitable donations annually. Her 2021 tax bill would be \$6,691, resulting in an average tax rate of 13.4%.

Conclusion

We can see from the examples above that, while all three taxpayers had \$50,000 of income, their average tax rates ranged from 1.8% (Eliza) to 14.9% (Angelica). We can see that both the type of income (for example, employment, dividends and capital gains) and the opportunity to claim various deductions (for example, RRSP contribution) and credits (for example, tuition, donation) all can have a significant impact on your average tax rate and the tax you ultimately pay.

Marginal effective tax rate

There is a third type of rate that must also be kept in mind for some taxpayers: Marginal Effective Tax Rate (METR). Similar to the marginal tax rate, the METR goes a step further by comparing the amount of tax paid on an additional dollar of income, taking into account not only the statutory federal and provincial income tax bracket thresholds and rates, but also the potential loss of income-tested tax deductions, credits and government benefits. That is, many government benefits, credits and programs are based on net income and are substantially or even totally reduced as your income gets higher.

For instance, both the “age credit” and the GST / HST credit are income-tested, as is the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), and Old Age Security (OAS) benefit payments (see Figure 5). As income increases, these credits and benefits may be reduced or even eliminated altogether.

Figure 5: A Sample of Various 2021 Federal Income Tested Benefits and Credits⁵

Benefit	Maximum value (\$)	Income at which recovery or reduction begins (\$)	Income at which benefits or credits are eliminated (\$)
Old Age Security	7,384	79,845	129,075
Guaranteed Income Supplement – Single	11,029	0	18,648
Age credit (federal)	7,713	38,893	90,313
GST / HST credit – Single	443	38,507	47,527

⁴ Excludes the Ontario Health Premium

⁵ Figure 5 reflects Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) amounts for the first quarter of 2021, and GST / HST Credit amounts for the period from July 2020 to June 2021.

For example, in 2021, the OAS recovery tax (sometimes referred to as “clawback”) begins when income is over \$79,845 and results in the OAS being fully recovered once income reaches \$129,075. The recovery tax of OAS alone can produce METRs of well over 50%, depending on your income and province of residence.

Withdrawals from a TFSA (unlike RRSP or RRIF withdrawals) are not considered “income” and do not impact federal income-tested benefits, such as the OAS. The potential for a future OAS recovery tax can sometimes influence the decision on whether to currently contribute to a TFSA or an RRSP. Similarly, future eligibility for the GIS and Age Credit may also impact such a decision.

It’s not just top income earners who face high METRs with loss of government benefits, since many benefit programs target lower-income individuals and families. For example, the Canada Child Benefit provides up to \$6,833 for each child under age six and up to \$5,765 for each child between ages 6 and 17; however, it is phased out based on the number of children and adjusted family net income.

One Fraser Institute report⁶ found that “For families with incomes between \$30,000 and \$60,000, METR averages are near to or exceed 50 percent; in Quebec, the METR is 53 percent”. The report said, “This is concerning from a policy perspective given how the tax and transfer system alters the incentives for individuals and families to seek out productive, income-generating opportunities.”

Failing to consider your METR, along with your marginal and average tax rates, in your financial planning discussions may lead to unintended consequences down the road.

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⁶ “Marginal Effective Tax Rates Across Provinces: High Rates on Low Income”, Philip Bazel, Fraser Institute, August 27, 2019, which is available online at fraserinstitute.org/studies/marginal-effective-tax-rates-across-provinces-high-rates-on-low-income.