



LIVING IN
NIAGARA
2020

Critical Indicators for Reflecting on Life in Niagara

Share Evidence. Plan Together.

Build a Stronger Future.

About Niagara Connects

Niagara Connects brings diverse people and organizations together to gather, share, use, and learn from reliable evidence (data, research, information, knowledge). We do this to support focused, holistic planning for a stronger future. The Living in Niagara (LIN) report and Niagara Knowledge Exchange (NKE) are integrated tools to support this work.



Niagara Connects operates under the umbrella of INCommunities. Together we are working as 'one hub', to strengthen how we connect people to services, and support evidence-informed collaboration, innovation, and community action toward a stronger Niagara.

Get connected at:

<http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/get-connected/> to receive regular Niagara Connects E-blasts, with quick links to the latest Niagara-focused evidence uploaded to the NKE (on average, 15 items/week).

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Photo courtesy of: Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority



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The symbol used for this fifth Living in Niagara report appears as an eye to indicate that we are looking forward as a community. We also have an eye on the past, where we can see the evidence that informs decision-making to strengthen the future.

The rays and dots that surround the “eye” represent people in motion. The dynamic mental, physical and emotional interaction of people is the very life blood that beats through a community.

The 12 colours used to create the “people” in the symbol represent the 12 local municipalities that exist within Niagara.

Bright colours emote optimism for strengthened quality of life as we move forward, together.

Report measures and links
to supporting data and
resources are available at

www.livinginniagarareport.com

Introduction

Niagara Connects presents this fifth snapshot of quality of life in Niagara at a unique time in modern history. The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting our region-wide community in profound and unanticipated ways.

Clearly, the pandemic is showing the vital role that timely access to reliable evidence plays in focused decision-making.

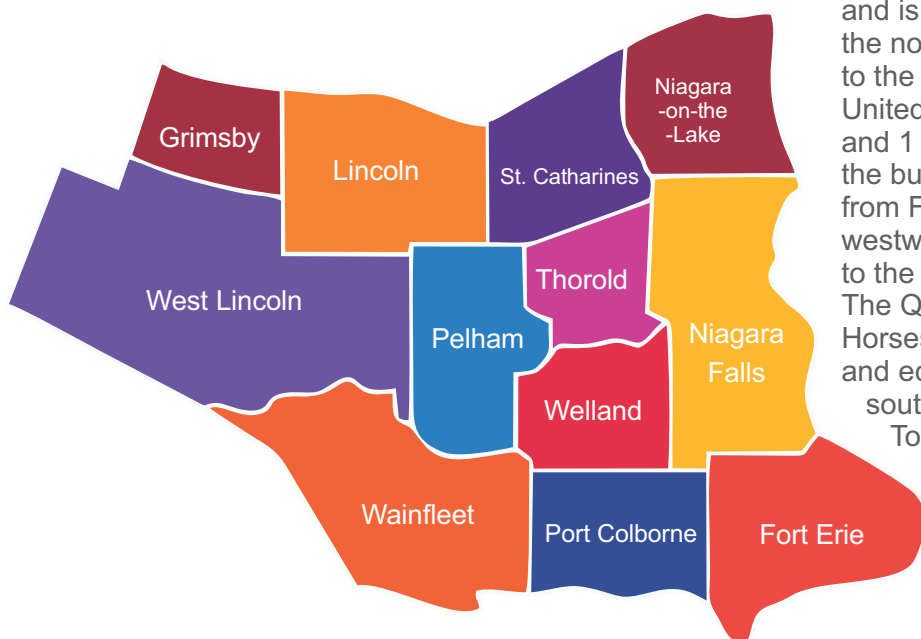
A diverse group of hundreds of people in Niagara engage in the ongoing knowledge-sharing which Niagara Connects facilitates, and which forms the basis of the Living in Niagara report. They do this to build up the Niagara-wide community's reservoir of reliable, accessible, Niagara-focused evidence. The report combines data, information, and front-line community expert opinion, to draw an evidence-informed picture of life in Niagara now; to point to what is emerging; and to identify suggested community action to address issues of common concern.

Evidence presented in the Living in Niagara report is used by people, organizations, institutions, researchers, educators and businesses to inform priority-setting; to secure funding; to support partnerships; and to learn about what's emerging in the Niagara context. Report construction methodology is evidence-informed and validated.

We acknowledge that this work is conducted on traditional territory of the Anishinaabe (Anii- shii- nabee) and Haudenosaunee (Ha-dee-no-shoni) peoples, many of whom continue to live and work here today. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum agreement. Today, this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples. Acknowledging reminds us that our great standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous people.

We greatly appreciate the ongoing support of the Niagara Community Foundation, in making the work of the Living in Niagara report and Niagara Knowledge Exchange possible.

Welcome to the Living in Niagara 2020 report!



The Niagara Region covers 1,852 square kilometres, and is bordered on 3 sides by water: Lake Ontario to the north, Lake Erie to the south, and the Niagara River to the east. The river forms a shared border with the United States; there are 5 border crossings, 4 by road and 1 by rail. The road border crossings link up with the busy Queen Elizabeth Way (QEW), which runs from Fort Erie in the south, north to Niagara Falls and westward, crossing the Welland Canal, running parallel to the south shore of Lake Ontario, onward to Hamilton. The QEW links Niagara as a part of the Golden Horseshoe, one of Canada's most densely-populated and economically diverse areas, stretching around the southwest end of Lake Ontario to include the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

What's new with the 2020 version of the Living in Niagara report

- The report is being launched in May, 2021. We took some extra time to include information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Niagara. Prior versions of the report were released in late November of 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2017.
- Evidence in the report is presented in 11 Sectors, rather than 12. Information about newcomers to Niagara, young children in Niagara and young people starting out in their careers in Niagara is included, respectively, in 3 Sectors: Community Belonging; Learning and Education; and Work and Employment. Prior to 2020, this information was presented in a Sector titled "People Getting Started in Niagara".
- Sector ratings are no longer included. This change resulted from 2019 community working sessions in which over 100 individuals engaged in helping Niagara Connects to refine the construction methodology for the report.
- Report modules are available for downloading, at <https://www.livinginniagarareport.com/>. On the site you will find Sector Summary Documents with Indicators; as well as Sector Technical Documents with Measures and links to data and resources.
- A series of virtual learning events will engage people in maximizing their use of the evidence in the report. To learn more, follow Niagara Connects on social media and/or go to the 'Get Connected' page on the Niagara Knowledge Exchange (NKE) to begin receiving the weekly Niagara Connects E-blast, and invitations to Living in Niagara learning events: <https://niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/get-connected/>

Photo courtesy of: Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority



Overall Opportunities Suggested for Action

Themes arising from this report, for community action to stabilize Niagara as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic include:

1. Equity Links to Prosperity – Creating the conditions for everyone to have access to opportunities, and to participate will increase prosperity and resiliency for the people of Niagara.

2. Digital Skills and Access to Technology are Essential – People of all ages, abilities and income levels require digital skills, technological devices, and reliable internet access, to be able to connect to their community, access services, and participate in paid or volunteer work.

3. Growth Balanced with Inclusion – Niagara continues growing toward a projected regional population of 610,000 persons by 2041. Inclusive growth calls for our community to deepen our understanding and ability to speak about equity, diversity and inclusion in relation to BIPOC (black, Indigenous and people of colour). Focused action is required to support women, women-led families, youth, lower-wage and gig workers, smaller businesses, and individuals with complex needs and/or mental health challenges.

4. Community-Building is Essential – To stabilize Niagara as we emerge from the pandemic, a whole-community approach is required, to:

- decrease the level of stress faced by service providers trying to meet pent-up demand upon re-opening;
- address the dramatic increase in severity and number of incidents of domestic violence occurring during the pandemic, by supporting the affected women, children and families;
- support local businesses, maximize local supply chains and help Niagara's iconic tourism sector to rebuild strength;
- ensure capacity exists for individuals and families to re-engage in recreation, sport, and arts/culture/heritage activities;
- re-engage volunteers in their community work; and
- acknowledge that the human effects of the pandemic will take time to heal.

Niagara Region Population 1996-2016

Source:

Niagara Region. 2016 Census,
Statistics Canada

Municipality	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016
Fort Erie	27,183	28,140	29,925	29,960	30,710
Grimsby	19,585	21,295	23,937	25,325	27,314
Lincoln	18,801	20,610	21,722	22,487	23,787
Niagara Falls	76,917	78,815	82,184	82,997	88,071
Niagara-on-the-Lake	13,238	13,840	14,587	15,400	17,511
Pelham	14,393	15,275	16,155	16,598	17,110
Port Colborne	18,451	18,450	18,599	18,424	18,306
St. Catharines	130,926	129,170	131,989	131,400	133,113
Thorold	17,883	18,045	18,224	17,931	18,801
Wainfleet	6,253	6,260	6,601	6,356	6,372
Welland	48,411	48,405	50,331	50,631	52,293
West Lincoln	11,513	12,265	13,167	13,837	14,500
Totals	403,554	410,574	427,421	431,346	447,888

5. Connectedness and Social Inclusion are Cornerstones of Well-Being – A global body of evidence, underscored by the pandemic, shows that people being connected to other people, and feeling they belong and are accepted is fundamental to healthy living.

6. Feelings of Loss are Common – The mental health effects caused by the uncertainty and sense of loss people are feeling during the COVID-19 pandemic are real. Acknowledging these effects is important for our community to be able to stabilize. Examples include loss of: predictability, routines, sense of safety, control, freedom, connections with others, and participation in rites of passage (eg. graduation events).

7. What's Emerging, and its Impact – Developing a Niagara-focused, community-driven methodology to describe what continues to emerge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, will help to guide decision-making as we navigate toward stability over the next 3 to 4 years.

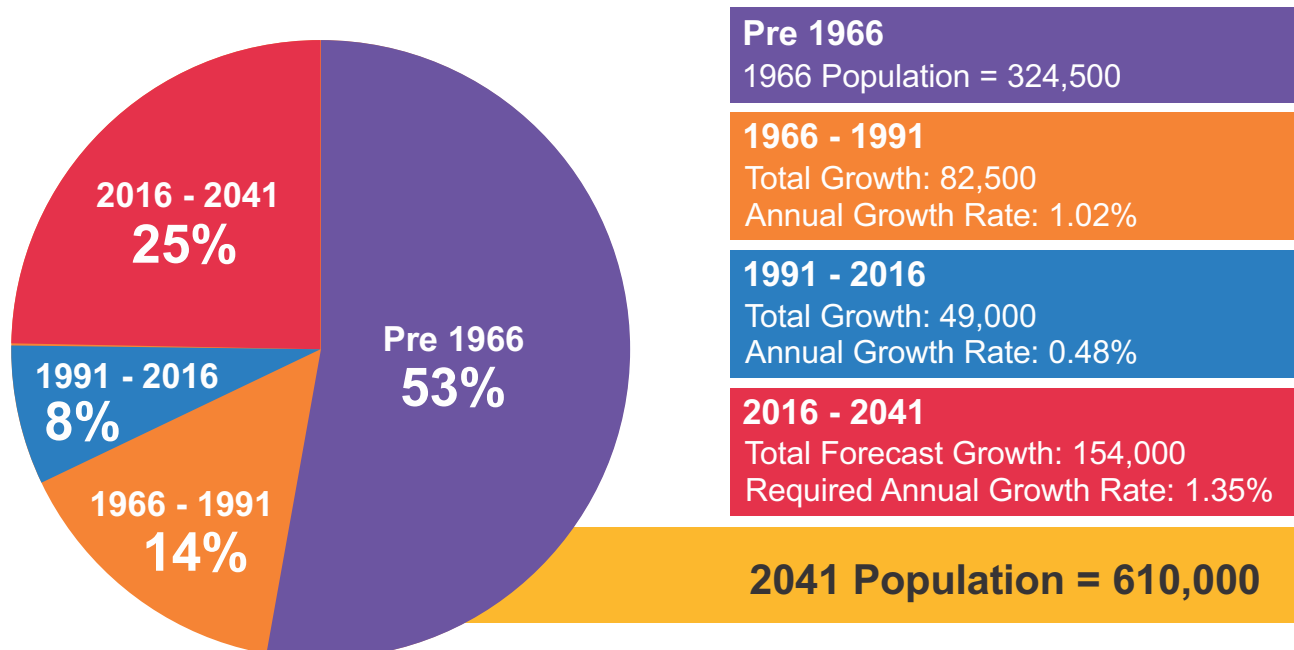
8. Opportunities Arising from the Pandemic Experience – Build upon lessons learned from our community's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, leverage citizens' increased interest in enjoying outdoor spaces to engage them in taking a sense of ownership in green space protection and restoration, as well as climate change response.

9. Celebrate Niagara's Strengths – Continue to create the conditions for Niagara businesses hardest hit by the pandemic to stabilize, by maximizing local supply chains; promoting support for Niagara's iconic tourism industry as borders and travel routes re-open; and by emphasizing the benefits of buying local.

10. Mental Wellness for All Ages – Promoting life-long mental wellness for everyone in Niagara, from the prenatal, infant and early childhood stages of life through to older age, remains a top priority in our community. The imperative to keep this priority at the forefront is being heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Historic and Projected Growth in the Niagara Region of Ontario

The Province of Ontario has forecast a 2041 Population of 610,00 persons for the Niagara Region.





Happening Now



Arts, Culture & Heritage

The presence and creative expression of a diverse range of arts, culture and heritage opportunities gives our community vitality and helps to bring people together.

- The annual Celebration of Nations Indigenous arts, culture and tradition gathering is held in September at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines. The three-day event caps off year-long programming that celebrates creativity, diversity and resilience. In 2019, the Celebration's third year, more than 40 events welcomed over 3,500 community members and visitors. The event was held virtually in 2020. It included an annual awards ceremony honoring outstanding achievement in Performing Arts; Visual Arts; Intellectual Advancement; Language and Culture; Empathic Traditions; and Two Row Alliance.
- A 2019 policy brief examining the economic impact of the culture sector in Niagara calls for identifying new ways for the sector to advance as a cornerstone of the region's tourism industry and creative economy. The brief cites the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector's role in strengthening community resilience, through broad impact on building openness, diversity and adaptability. The culture sector is defined as including occupations in the performing arts; spectator sports; heritage amenities; amusement and recreation activities.
- The Canada Summer Games will be held in Niagara in August, 2022. Planning is underway to ensure that cultural events and celebrations affiliated with the Games will help to shine a light on our region's wealth of arts, culture and heritage amenities.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, museums and other organizations in this sector in Niagara are finding new audiences through virtual programming.



What's Emerging

- Building up the inventory of Niagara's cultural assets, and describing the depth of the informal dimension of the cultural sector are identified as important steps in helping our community to establish upstream support systems to position workers in the sector to scale up activities, and participate more fully in the economy.
- Public Libraries in Niagara are increasingly recognized for being welcoming community hubs that offer comprehensive access to information and digital resources. They help citizens to bridge the technology divide; provide reliable access to the internet, computers, and technology; and they partner with human service agencies to offer opportunities for satellite outreach. (This statement is also included in the Community Belonging Sector of the Living in Niagara-2020 report.)
- The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating effect on the numbers of people who are able to experience, and who are able to express themselves through in-person arts, culture and heritage events and amenities. It is having a similar effect on revenue levels for non-profit arts organizations. An informal preliminary review of the pandemic's impact estimates that collectively, local non-profit arts organizations in Niagara lost millions of dollars in revenue generation in 2020.
- Interest in finding the optimal balance between virtual and in-person programming is building. This may make arts, culture and heritage events more accessible for people who are not able to access programming in-person. A hybridized model could also help to offset any pandemic effects that last longer than anticipated.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Engage Arts, Culture and Heritage sector players in developing a common agenda and measures of success regarding the role this sector plays in the health and well-being of Niagara. Describe the sector's direct and indirect impact on Niagara's growth.
- Establish a baseline description of cultural knowledge in the Niagara-wide community.
- Describe and measure the breadth and depth of the digital divide in Niagara, and work collaboratively across sectors to address the gap.
- Identify and address barriers to participation in Arts, Culture and Heritage activities in Niagara.
- Describe the role of, and opportunities for volunteers in the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector in Niagara.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- **Involvement in and Time Spent on Arts, Culture and Heritage Activities in Niagara**
- **Arts, Culture and Heritage Assets in Niagara**
- **Contribution of the Cultural Sector to the Socio-Economic Wellbeing of Niagara**



Community Belonging

Happening Now

People having a sense of belonging and being connected to their community is vital to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of everyone and everything.

- Municipal governments across Niagara are putting strategies in place to consider inclusion, diversity, connectedness and gender equity in their planning and decision-making.
- Almost all local municipalities in Niagara have established Youth, Seniors, Age-Friendly and/or Wellness Advisory Committees.
- Public Libraries in Niagara are increasingly recognized for being welcoming community hubs that offer comprehensive access to information and digital resources. They help citizens to bridge the technology divide; provide reliable access to the internet, computers, and technology; and they partner with human service agencies to offer opportunities for satellite outreach. (This statement also appears in the Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector.)
- The importance of making culturally-appropriate mental health services accessible to newcomers is being recognized in Niagara.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in increased efforts to reduce social isolation and remove barriers to participation, by making equitable access to virtual connections possible for everyone. Examples include: agencies providing clients with access to devices; an emphasis on digital skills training; young volunteers mentoring older adults to strengthen their tech skills; 'seniors centres without walls' telephone events; and renewed attention to closing gaps in high-speed internet infrastructure across Niagara.



What's Emerging

- The onset of COVID-19 is highlighting the vital role that non-profits and charities play in community well-being. Nationally, these organizations account for 8.5% of GDP and employ 2.4 million Canadians, of which 70% are women.
- Disruptive effects of the pandemic on volunteer levels, access to volunteer labour, and paid staff capacity to engage volunteers is causing charitable and non-profit organizations to assess their capacity and approaches going forward.
- Experiencing the pandemic is reminding us of the proven health benefits, for everyone and for the whole community, of people being able to connect with others and participate.
- Intentionally engaging the voices of newcomers, (im)migrants and black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC) in community development is seen as essential to strengthening Niagara.
- Plans are underway to engage thousands of volunteers to support the work of hosting the Canada Summer Games in Niagara in 2022.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Acknowledge the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on charitable and non-profit organizations, and keep an eye on their ability to stabilize. These organizations provide essential services, play an important role in economic growth, create jobs, and are employers in our community.
- Implement measurable actions for reducing barriers to participation, across the Social Determinants of Health. Do this to strengthen Niagara as an equitable, diverse, inclusive, welcoming community for all people.
- Support organizations' efforts to re-establish their volunteer base and enhance volunteer training, in response to pandemic-related changes. Increase engagement of a younger, diverse pool of volunteers.
- Create the conditions for increasing voter turnout rates in Niagara by supporting equitable access to voting for vulnerable individuals.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

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| • Charitable Giving | • Trust in Others |
| • Immigrants, Refugees, and International Students in Niagara | • Volunteering |
| • Sense of Community Belonging | • Voter Turnout |



Community Safety

Happening Now

Our perception of safety at home, in our neighbourhood and on the road contributes to well-being. Trust in our surroundings helps us to be socially connected.

- As a Canada-US border community, Niagara is an epicenter for human trafficking. An estimated 75% of human trafficking victims who have been trafficked in the GTA will come through the Golden Horseshoe area at some point in their journey.
 - In 2018, 15 agencies across Niagara co-signed the Niagara Region Emergency Response Protocol for Human Trafficking, including police, fire departments, the YWCA, as well as those representing Indigenous women, victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, and at-risk youth.
 - In 2019, the Niagara Regional Police Service formed a Human Trafficking Unit, as part of its Special Victims Unit.
 - In 2020, the YWCA Niagara Region opened a safe house, where up to 6 survivors of human trafficking can access secure housing and resources in a healing environment.
- The new Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) service delivery model of Niagara Emergency Medical Services (EMS) has reduced call volumes; improved response times for critically ill patients; reduced patient transports to hospital; and increased access to appropriate services for specific groups such as individuals experiencing mental health challenges, seniors who have fallen, or palliative patients. A McMaster University analysis found that the MIH model provides opportunities for cost efficiencies as high as 64%.
- The Overdose Prevention and Education Network of Niagara (OPENN) reports a 25.3% increase in calls to Niagara EMS for possible overdoses between 2019 and 2020. In 2020, in the Niagara region there were 700 emergency department visits for opioid overdoses, compared to 689 in 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to this increase, with people in isolation cut off from their support and supply systems, creating stress, anxiety, and desperation.
- The first supervised injection site in Niagara opened in December, 2018. StreetWorks operates out of Positive Living Niagara in St. Catharines. By early 2020, this harm-reduction program reported serving about 1,300 registered clients, with many of the individuals served being homeless.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Women's Shelters in Niagara are reporting a dramatic increase in the instances and severity of domestic violence. The pandemic self-isolation measures in place put victims of abuse at increased risk of violence.



What's Emerging

- Increased attention is being paid to the fact that there is an important connection between individuals feeling a sense of belonging, and feeling safe and secure in their own community.
- Crime Stoppers of Niagara has received funding to map elder abuse reporting in Niagara. Areas of concern for the new program include: financial crimes by strangers; crime and abuse by relatives and caregivers; and crime and abuse in institutional settings. Provincial research shows between four and ten per cent of seniors report some form of elder abuse; and the abuse is underreported, due to fear, isolation, dependency and shame.
- Niagara Region is preparing a community safety and well-being plan mandated by the provincial Police Services Act. The intent is to develop local strategies to address root causes of complex social issues, so that people in need of help receive the right response, at the right time, and by the right service provider. An interim report, released in 2020, identified five top priorities arising from a public survey and focus groups in Niagara: addictions/substance misuse; affordable housing; mental health; poverty and income; homelessness.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Take a whole-community approach to ensuring supports are in place for women, children and youth who have been dramatically affected by domestic violence, which has intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Prioritize investments in affordable housing and mental health services in Niagara.
- As we emerge from the pandemic:
 - Acknowledge the impact of volunteers having to suspend their involvement in agencies such as women's shelters; and the impact of supporters not being able to participate in usual fundraising events. Raise awareness that these agencies welcome engagement from individuals with a desire to give back.
 - Recognize the pronounced tension between increasing levels of need for supports for victims of domestic violence, and limited availability of resources.
- Examine agencies' practices in terms of diversity and inclusion. This includes service delivery policies; what spaces look like; and recruitment of both staff and volunteers.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- **Crime in Niagara**
- **Emergency Services**
- **Feeling Safe and Secure in Niagara**
- **Motor Vehicle Collisions and Fatalities**
- **Special Victims**



Economic Prosperity

Happening Now

Examining prosperity in our community requires us to look at both the vibrancy of our economy; and the well-being of the people who live here.

- Niagara Region Economic Development's 5-year Strategy (2019-2024) identifies Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Tourism as key sectors. It focuses on establishing the environment and infrastructure to support a strong economic future for Niagara.
- The 2018-2020 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Evaluation calls for development of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy to make deliberate investment guided by enhanced research. The vision is for all services to be designed for social inclusion, to align with poverty reduction priorities.
- Significant efforts are being made to support businesses in Niagara to be able to stabilize beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. The Niagara Economic Rapid Response Team notes that prior to the pandemic, our economy was experiencing incremental progress, with high job creation; record low unemployment; record levels of investment in industrial, commercial and residential building construction; record export values; high tourism visitors and expenditures; high population growth; high retail sales, and many other positive indicators. The emergence of COVID-19 halted the economic progress and is negatively affecting most industry sectors.



What's Emerging

- Planning by looking through lenses of both inclusion and equity is seen as key to Niagara's growth and development.
- Ensuring equitable access to technology, the internet, and digital skills for people of all ages is essential to strengthen our community.
- Substantial demand for affordable housing, especially for single-person units, comes in particular from lower-income workers, who are vital for a viable tourist economy in Niagara. A combination of factors includes: an increase in housing prices, a growing population in the region, and Niagara's predominance of lower-paying service jobs.
- A 2020 Niagara Food Security Network report provides evidence to inform COVID-19 response policy and planning. Voices of individuals experiencing food insecurity in Niagara, and broader evidence show: "to effectively and equitably address food insecurity is to address inadequate income for individuals and families". The report calls for all levels of government to build upon pandemic response measures by developing a basic income model for Canada.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Recognize that people having equitable access to technology, the internet, and digital skills is essential for Niagara to thrive.
- Focus on maximizing opportunities for Niagara as a border community with substantial experience in cross-border supply chain business. Leverage strengths in connectivity, transportation corridors, border proximity, and opening up of canal lands. Explore lessons learned about cross-border logistics that Niagara may be positioned to share.
- In planning as Niagara emerges from the pandemic:
 - Develop industry-specific action plans to help stabilize businesses and employers
 - Build on what we've seen, in terms of possibilities borne out of necessity during the pandemic, with governments being more responsive, improving resiliency and providing quicker turn-arounds
 - Make a commitment to balancing both economic and social well-being
 - Acknowledge the unequal impact of COVID-19 on women and their families; and on marginalized groups

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- **Economic Development in Niagara**
- **Income and Earnings in Niagara**



Happening Now



Environment

Niagara is known for its unique geography and environment. To ensure a sustainable future, it is essential for residents to see their role in protecting and restoring our natural assets; in reducing and recycling household waste; and in responding to climate impacts.

- Through development of Niagara's new Official Plan, the Niagara Region is examining climate change effects in Niagara, and policies to support mitigation and adaptation in our community. The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) is at the table, and similarly is looking at climate effects in policy and planning.
- The Mood Walks program promotes the role of parks and recreation in mental health and well-being. It is led by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in Ontario, in partnership with Hike Ontario, Conservation Ontario, the provincial government and local social service agencies. Local Mood Walks participants include CMHA Niagara Branch, the Niagara Bruce Trail Club, the Niagara Region Mental Health Program, and Brock University.
- Through Geospatial Niagara, community members have submitted an expression of interest to the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks, for Niagara to establish itself as a UNESCO Global Geopark. The proposed name, Ohnia:kara is the Mowhawk word for 'neck between two bodies of water'. Already, across all 12 municipalities of the region, 78 geosites of geological, environmental, or cultural interest, have been identified.
- The Niagara River offers several ecological, recreational and economic beneficial water uses, such as power generation, tourism, recreation; it is a source of drinking water; and it supports over 1200 species. The work of the Niagara River Area of Concern Remedial Action Plan (RAP) is progressing. Significant improvements have been made in water quality, habitat, and the clean-up of contaminated sediments.
- The Niagara River Ramsar Binational Steering Committee is pursuing a transboundary Ramsar Site designation. This would commit, under the global Ramsar Convention, Canada and the US to continue to work together to ensure advancement of environmental progress achieved in the past 50 years. In October, 2019, the Niagara River (US) Corridor was officially designated as a Ramsar Site (Wetland of International Importance).



What's Emerging

- Understanding is increasing about the important role Conservation Authorities play in Ontario, regarding protection of watersheds and their natural features. The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) encompasses the entire Niagara region, 21% of the City of Hamilton and 25% of Haldimand County. The Niagara Peninsula is one of the most complex watersheds in the province. Its climate, biodiversity and growing zones are unique in North America. The Peninsula includes lands drained by the Niagara River, Twenty Mile Creek, the Welland River and the Welland Canal; is nestled between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario; and is traversed by the Niagara Escarpment.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting the connection between mental wellness promotion and people in our community having access to enjoy outdoor spaces.
- The work of making restoration improvements in the Niagara River Remedial Action Plan continues. Focus areas are: restrictions on fish and wildlife consumption; degradation of fish and wildlife populations; beach closings; and degradation of benthos (benthic invertebrates, a source of food for fish and aquatic birds).
- The Niagara Food Security Network is building its foundation, with over 100 individuals and community organizations working together to make Niagara more food secure for everyone. A Food Resources in Niagara webpage and Niagara Food Assets map are now available.
- Taking a smart growth approach to engaging the community in land use planning in Niagara is being encouraged. The intent is to balance perspectives and enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of the process.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Encourage residents in Niagara to better appreciate green spaces and nature-based solutions for their value as green infrastructure, which is part of a healthy and sustainable community.
- Engage residents in local planning for improved resource management and green space protection and restoration. This will lead to improved decision-making that is based on diverse ideas and opinions.
- Inspire more citizen science in Niagara, in order to build base awareness, a feeling of ownership, and to complement local decision-making.
- Share knowledge, and build consensus about the state of the environment in Niagara.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|---------|
| • Air | • Climate Impacts | • Waste |
| • Biodiversity | • Land | • Water |



Happening Now



Health and Wellness

Promotion of lifelong wellness, and equitable access to health and human services for everyone in our community is essential for the vitality of Niagara.

- Looking through the lenses of health equity and inclusion when planning is being emphasized, on many levels. Examples include local municipal Health Equity, Wellness, Age-Friendly and Social Determinants of Health initiatives; the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network Health Equity Priority Table; and Niagara Region signing onto the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities.
- The Ontario Seniors Dental Care program is now available for seniors in Niagara who live in low income and do not have access to any other form of dental benefits.
- Mobile Integrated Health Care (MIH) is being delivered by Niagara Emergency Medical Services, to provide on-site urgent or nonurgent care. Research in 2018-2019 found that, compared to regular ambulance responses, MIH was associated with a decrease in the proportion of patients transported to the emergency department, and saved health care costs.
- The StreetWorks Harm Reduction program is providing safer injection and inhalation supplies to help individuals protect their health.
- The Youth Wellness Hub Niagara (YWHN) is one of ten Hubs in Ontario that recently received annualized provincial funding. YWHN is a partnership between the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre; the John Howard Society in Welland; the Centre de santé communautaire in Welland; and Contact Niagara for Children's and Developmental Services. Through the Hub, all youth, ages 12 to 25, may access mental health and substance use supports; primary care services; housing, education, and employment supports; and a variety of wellness activities.



What's Emerging

- In 2020, the Niagara Ontario Health Team (NOHT-ESON) was approved by the province. The Team includes 45 partners that provide a wide array of services, including primary care, home care, emergency services, public health, social services, mental health and addictions, rehab and acute care. The partners are working together to create a coordinated approach to care. The intent is to make it easier for patients to access services; create seamless transitions between providers; and improve patients' overall experience and health outcomes.
- An estimated 20 per cent of children and youth in Ontario have a mental health disorder. In Niagara that translates into approximately 18,000 children and youth under the age of 18. Of those, Pathstone Mental Health annually provides services for approximately 6,000. A region-wide process is being developed, to identify and collect population child and youth mental health data, to provide clarity on the estimated 12,000 children and youth in Niagara who need mental health services and supports.
- The importance of residents learning about and paying attention to risks of infectious diseases is being emphasized.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is showing;
 - It is time to change the way health care providers engage with individuals, toward modalities such as smartphones, tablets, computers, digital medical equipment, patient portals and remote monitoring of clinical measurements.
 - Preserving the human rights and dignity of individuals living in Long Term Care is imperative.
 - The health impacts of social isolation, for people of all ages, are profound.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Acknowledge the human effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on workers, clients, organizations and systems in this Sector. Mental health challenges; long-term effects of patients not having regular health care appointments; and inability to provide school-age vaccines due to school closures are some examples.
- Encourage our community to continue to extend the sympathy, grace, generosity of spirit, kindness, support for others and care for neighbours demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Optimize individuals' health care experiences and outcomes by transitioning toward proactively getting the right services to population segments that include individuals with common needs.
- Prioritize advocating for system modernization through timely access to reliable, integrated health data to support focused decision-making.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- Injury Rates in Niagara
- Illness and Disease in Niagara
- Lifestyle Indicators in Niagara
- Population Health
- Prevention and Well-Being
- Health Services in Niagara



Housing and Shelter

Happening Now

Individuals and families having access to affordable, safe and reliable housing and shelter is fundamental to community well-being.

- In 2019, the 5-year review of Niagara Region's 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP) identified a shift toward increased focus on: ending homelessness and chronic homelessness; preventing homelessness; supporting community housing development; engagement and collaboration with Indigenous partners; and addressing the housing and homeless services needs of equity-seeking groups, including those with complex needs, persons with a disability, persons with a developmental disability, older adults, youth, women, newcomers and refugees, and Franco-Canadians.
- In mid-2019, Niagara Region joined Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C), an ambitious national change effort helping a core group of 33 leading communities end chronic homelessness in Canada. In December, 2019 almost 300 service providers, people with lived experience of homelessness, political leaders, regional staff and others in the housing sector participated in a region-wide presentation on ending homelessness. Guest speaker Iain De Jong advocates for changing the service delivery paradigm from one of charity to one of justice. He provided insights for assessing alignment of community efforts with best practice.
- The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NPRN) Affordable Housing Priority Table is focusing on tenant rights and responsibilities. Going forward, NPRN will increase emphasis on describing the housing crisis in Niagara through community experience and storytelling, with supporting data.



Happening Now cont.

- Peer Support Navigators are easing health systems navigation for individuals experiencing homelessness, through the Niagara HELPS (Homelessness Emergency Liaison & Peer Support) project. This initiative involves individuals with lived experience utilizing both their compassion and knowledge of community resources. It also helps hospital Emergency Department staff to deepen their understanding of barriers faced by the homeless population.
- In November, 2020 Niagara became one of 23 Canadian communities in the Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) movement to have quality real-time, person-specific data for everyone experiencing chronic homelessness. Using this By-Name List, which at the outset included 336 people, Niagara can coordinate support and services to end homelessness for these individuals and families. The system level data on inflow, outflow, and total active homelessness can be used to inform improvement projects, as well as monitor trends and progress toward achieving functional zero chronic homelessness.
- Niagara's second homelessness Point-in-Time (PiT) Count was conducted in late March 2018. This snapshot found 625 people to be experiencing homelessness, in emergency and Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, in transitional housing programs, and in unsheltered locations. This number includes 144 children aged 0-15 years. The third PiT Count, to be conducted in March, 2021 will help to ensure the comprehensiveness of Niagara's By-Name List, and further inform local response to homelessness during COVID-19.
- At the end of 2020, more than 6,500 households were on the Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) Centralized Waiting list, an increase of almost 2,000 households since 2017.
- In order to facilitate new affordable rental housing in Niagara, NRH now provides project management support to assist housing providers. Since 2017, 130 new units have been created by NRH, housing providers and developers. An additional 230 units are in the discussion stage.
- The Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) provides a subsidy to applicants on the Centralized Waiting List toward rent to their current landlord in the private market. Since it was introduced in Spring 2020, 206 applicants in Niagara have been accepted into the COHB program through NRH.

What's Emerging

- Factors heightening the affordable housing crisis in Niagara, and related evidence, are being more fully-described. Ongoing low supply of rental stock; steep housing price increases; forecasted population growth; in-migration of population from the GTA to Niagara; demand for short-term vacation rentals; student housing; renovictions; the sizable waitlist for affordable housing units; the gig economy/trend toward working remotely; and the unmet needs of vulnerable groups are all factors.
- The RAFT (Niagara Resource Service for Youth) is significantly reducing the rate of youth going into homeless shelters by helping individuals to connect with family members who are able to provide housing support.



What's Emerging cont.

- Niagara Regional Housing (NRH), formerly acting as Service Manager on behalf of Niagara Region, is amalgamating with Niagara Region to enhance creative opportunities and benefit from the integration of human services. In addition, NRH and community partners have formed the Housing Development Committee, to explore innovative ways to provide new affordable housing across Niagara.
- The Niagara Affordable Housing Master Plan is currently being developed. The Plan will examine Canadian and international initiatives with consideration to workplans, incentives, processes, costs and final outcomes. This will assist in establishing new social housing stock and planning for the future of affordable housing in Niagara.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Strengthen supports for households with low, medium, or high complexity of needs (eg. mental health and addictions; trauma). Do this to address the impact of poverty on housing stability, in alignment with best practices and the Built for Zero Canada model.
- Continue to focus on the demand in Niagara for more rental supports, more affordable housing units and more supportive housing for households facing complex issues.
- Work together to explore options for providing client needs-based transitional housing that is flexible to support individual households.
- Pay attention to the continuum of housing and its affordability in Niagara; be mindful that incomes are not rising in pace with housing prices; and collaborate to ensure we have good-quality safety net systems in place.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- **Housing Availability**
- **Housing Affordability**
- **Homelessness Prevention**
- **Municipal Housing Policy and Regulations**



Learning and Education

Having access to inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities is essential for people to grow, participate and prosper.

Happening Now

- Progress toward the Niagara Children's Planning Council Community Goal is being measured by Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores. The EDI is a questionnaire completed, every 3 years, by Ontario kindergarten teachers, measuring children's ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations in five key domains:
 - Physical Health & Well-Being
 - Social Competence
 - Emotional Maturity
 - Language & Cognitive Development
 - Communication Skills & General Knowledge.
- In 2018 in Niagara, EDI data was collected for 3,606 Senior Kindergarten students. The 2018 EDI results for Niagara show that:
 - Vulnerability in the Physical Health and Wellbeing Subdomain increased.
 - Vulnerability in the Social Competence Subdomain is higher than the provincial average.
 - Vulnerability in the Emotional Maturity Subdomain remains of concern; it is higher than the provincial average for the third time in a row.
- Educators, students, families and education institutions at all levels are experiencing significant challenges due to the unpredictability of changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A range of initiatives exist for older adults in Niagara to engage in community-based learning. Examples include: Third Age Learning Niagara; Lifelong Learning Niagara; Public Library programs; local municipal recreation programs; Cyber Seniors; and the TECH CONNECT project.
- A total of 22 EarlyON Family Centres in 16 zones across Niagara offer high-quality drop-in programs for children from birth to six years of age, their parents and caregivers.



What's Emerging

- Concerns around student mental health and well-being have been on the rise for 2 or 3 years, and are being exacerbated by COVID-19. Educators are anticipating challenges in this regard upon return to in-person school attendance.
- The Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) Working Group of the Niagara Children's Planning Council is working with school board partners to pilot the MDI tool with grade 4 and 7 students. Gathering data for children ages 7 to 12 will support measurement of impact and focused decision-making.
- Addressing students' food security is the focus of a range of initiatives. Evidence shows that 15.1% of households in Niagara are food insecure, above the 12.7% rate for Canada. Food insecurity is more prevalent among households with children than those without children. It is cited as one of the "top ten threats to the well-being of children in Canada". The Niagara Food Security Network emphasizes: "to effectively and equitably address food insecurity is to address inadequate income for individuals and families".
- An assessment is being made of the economic impact of COVID-19 on post-secondary institutions in Niagara. Factors include having to shift many programs to a virtual model, a decline in enrolment, and students having the ability to stay at home while studying virtually. For the 2020-21 school year, the impact on the Niagara economy is estimated to be between \$94.7 and \$117.6 million. The calculation includes effects on the Niagara rental market, public transit ridership revenue, student spending in Niagara, and available labour supply.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Continue to raise awareness of Early Development Instrument (EDI) testing results for Niagara, to guide decision-making about design of programs and services. Investment in early childhood development is an investment in health equity, and the overall well-being of our community.
- Strengthen equitable access to the internet; to technology; and to digital skills and confidence, across Niagara's school boards, post-secondary institutions, and community learning hubs, such as public libraries.
- Pay close attention to the impact of pandemic-related loss of presence of international students in Niagara; and lost opportunities for learners to participate in school boards' continuing education programs.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- **EQAO Scores**
- **Early Years Learning**
- **Levels of Educational Attainment**
- **Literacy and Essential Skills**
- **School Enrolment Trends and Presence of International Students**
- **Technology Use and its Influence on Education and Learning**
- **Student Mental Wellness**



Recreation and Sports

Happening Now

Having access to local facilities, spaces, and opportunities to participate in recreation and sports activities enriches residents' lives and helps to attract people to Niagara.

- A brief by The Centre for Sport Capacity at Brock University describes the benefits, beyond economic impact, of developing a regional sport-hosting strategy. The brief emphasizes the importance of focusing on Niagara's unique portfolio of physical, capital and human-resource infrastructure; and on supporting Niagara sport stakeholders such as local sport clubs and associations that already have human resources and technical expertise.
- The connection between access to enjoyment of outdoor spaces and mental wellness is being described through implementing the provincial Mood Walks hiking program in Niagara. Research about the program's benefits calls for greater collaboration between the parks and recreation and health sectors, to benefit residents' physical, mental and emotional health.
- The Canada Summer Games will be held August 6 to 21, 2022 in Niagara. An estimated 5,000 young athletes and their coaches, as well as thousands of volunteers will participate.
- The Active Niagara Network and Age-Friendly Niagara Network are two examples of region-wide groups promoting the importance of collaboration, to increase residents' access to opportunities to participate in recreation, sport, and life-long physical fitness activities.



What's Emerging

- The COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in increased attention being paid to the importance, for people of all ages, of being outdoors and connecting with nature.
- The pandemic is having a profound effect on volunteers, and volunteering opportunities across all sectors in our community. This has major implications for the recreation and sports sector in Niagara and beyond.
- Evidence is being gathered to strengthen planning for parks and recreation departments across Niagara as our community emerges from the pandemic.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Take a coordinated approach across Niagara to gather information from recreation providers, that will help to strengthen planning for getting back to full capacity as we continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Consider the effects that potential pent-up demand during the pandemic may have on recreation facilities being able to provide access.
- Pay attention to the trend toward balance, with families and individuals participating in unstructured, less formal programming.
- Prepare to safely welcome back both participants and volunteers, as programs and services re-open in our community.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- **Facilities**
- **Green and Open Space**
- **Participation Levels**
- **Benefits**
- **Partnerships**



Transportation & Mobility

Everyone in our community having access to a range of affordable, sustainable transportation choices, and ease of movement of people and goods are essential for quality of life.

Happening Now

- The NRT OnDemand Ridesharing Pilot Project for communities in West Niagara launched in August, 2020. Riders can request trips in real-time through an app or over the phone by selecting a pickup point and destination. For a \$3 fare, residents of Grimsby, Lincoln and Pelham can access trips within their municipality. For a \$6 fare, residents of Grimsby, Lincoln, Pelham, Wainfleet and West Lincoln can access trips to other communities. NRT OnDemand riders arriving at any of NRT's three transit hubs (St. Catharines Bus Terminal; Welland Bus Terminal; Port Colborne City Hall) can transfer onto Regional or local transit to complete their trip.
- The work of integrating municipal transit is underway. A Niagara Transit Governance Study completed in October, 2020 found a significant opportunity to increase transit use in the region through amalgamation. The study recommends a Full Commission Model because of its autonomy and financial benefits.
- Six local municipalities, and Niagara Region have Active Transportation (AT) Advisory Committees. These committees advise on AT priorities, such as connectivity; bike lanes; safe and active routes to school; and public education about the benefits, necessities and safety considerations of active transportation.
- As of 2019, the Ontario by Bike Network had certified 1,531 bicycle-friendly businesses in the province, including 163 in Niagara. In 2018, the GO Transit Toronto-Niagara Seasonal Service Route transported a total of 2,557 bicycles. Top activity preferences by Ontario cycling tourists, in order, are: visiting museums and cultural sites; wine and beer tastings; going to the beach; hiking and other outdoor activities; and arts and studio tours.



What's Emerging

- The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the important role of community-based transportation and shuttle services, in supporting vulnerable individuals and those with complex challenges to be able to access health and human services.
- Local municipal governments are working with Niagara Regional Council to refine financial, governance and service planning aspects of an integrated transit model for Niagara.
- Overall transit ridership across Niagara is projected to grow by up to 80% by 2031. It is projected that most local municipal transit services in the region can expect over 25% growth. The highest rates of increase are projected for the Town of Lincoln; the Town of Pelham; and the City of Port Colborne.
- The NRT OnDemand Ridesharing Pilot Project launch was well-received, and ridership is expected to grow. Between mid-August, 2020 and the end of February, 2021, a total of 11,342 rides were taken within and between Grimsby, Lincoln, Pelham, West Lincoln, St. Catharines, Welland, Wainfleet and Port Colborne.
- A Complete Streets Design Manual is being developed by Niagara Region Public Works, to guide Regional Road system planning and design. The complete streets approach considers the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and motorists; and focuses on building streets that balance these needs and prioritize road safety. Consideration is also given to creating places in streets that contribute to healthy ecosystems, social inclusion, and vibrant business activity.
- Planning and capital works projects continue, for expanded GO service in Niagara. In 2020, a Metrolinx business case update specified that there will be 11 GO trains daily, 7 days a week, to and from Niagara. The service pattern will include 6 outbound trains from Niagara Falls to Union Station, and 5 trains inbound from Union Station to Niagara Falls.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Build upon momentum toward transit integration and enhanced GO service in Niagara, to maximize resources and take advantage of growth opportunities as our community emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Continue to support active transportation and complete streets planning and community action.
- Bring municipal and community agency transportation leaders together to share information. Do this for the purpose of achieving cohesion and continual improvement, by collectively looking through an inclusivity lens.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- Collision Rates in Niagara Municipalities
- Transportation Planning in Niagara
- Affordability and Accessibility of Transportation
- Transportation Routes and Volume



Work and Employment

Jobseekers having access to quality jobs, workers' ability to make a living wage, and employers being able to find a match between employees' skills and the jobs being offered are key to Niagara's growth and development.

Happening Now

- Leading up to the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020, Niagara's employment rates had been increasing, in line with the national trend.
- 2019 data shows Niagara's top 5 sectors by employment: Accommodation and food services; Retail trade; Health care and social assistance; Manufacturing; and Construction. The top 5 sectors by employment growth rate were: Professional, scientific, technical service; Accommodation and food services; Transportation and warehousing; Health care and social assistance; and Educational services.
- Small businesses (including for-profit entities, non-profits and registered charities), with between 1 and 99 employees represent over 97% of Niagara's employers.
- The effect of employment precarity on individual, family and community health is becoming more recognized in Niagara.
- The Ontario Living Wage Network calculation for Niagara for 2019 was \$18.12/hour. A living wage reflects what earners need to be paid, based on actual costs of living and being included in the community. By December, 2020, a total of 45 Niagara employers had committed to being Certified Living Wage Employers.



What's Emerging

- Niagara is part of an employment services prototype project, with changes the provincial government is making to bring together services previously delivered separately through Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program and Employment Ontario Service. A consortium led by Fedcap began its role as service system manager for Hamilton-Niagara in 2020.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is an extremely challenging time for employers, employees and job-seekers alike. Barriers and supports are being identified, to assist these people as our community emerges from the pandemic.
- A surge in the Ontario Works caseload in Niagara is anticipated in 2021. People living in low income have been disproportionately impacted during the pandemic. They are more likely to live in overcrowded communities; be impacted by change in the employment landscape; and work in industries that increase proximity to the public.
- Critical uncertainties that will affect labour supply and demand in the coming two years include: changes in women's participation in the labour force; and the ability of local tourism employers to maintain operations at reduced levels of capacity.
- Implications of the significant economic impact of COVID-19 on Niagara women in the workforce is being examined. Women dominate the workforce in some of the hardest-hit sectors, such as accommodation and food service; and the retail trade. Complex factors include: the role accessible childcare plays in the economy; necessity for flexible hours and paid sick leave for productivity; and the lower and part-time wages that have become associated with occupations dominated by women.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Acknowledge the importance of health and well-being, including mental health, for individuals, families and everyone in the workplace, as our community emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Consider the effects of missed milestones during the pandemic; and related long-term impacts for the younger generation and jobseekers of all ages.
- Recognize that having digital skills is essential for modern workplace competency.

Indicators Measures for these indicators can be found at: www.livinginniagarareport.com

- **Employment Services in Niagara**
- **Jobs in Niagara**
- **Labour Force in Niagara**
- **Niagara-wide Coordination and Planning**
- **Workplace Injuries and Workplace Psychological Health and Safety**

Subscribers

Thank you to the Subscribers listed on this page. They have invested in the work of Niagara Connects over the past 3 years.

These community partners are leaders in building a Niagara-wide culture of gathering, using, and learning together from reliable evidence.

In January, 2021, Niagara Connects and INCommunities integrated as 'one hub', with a strong commitment to the vision: "all people are supported and connected in communities that are thriving". During 2020, we heard from partners and stakeholders that they resoundingly support this integration. As well, they provided insights that continue to inform how we grow and deliver service.

"The Niagara Community Foundation is excited to see Niagara Connects and INCommunities partnering to integrate the assets the two organizations steward for Niagara.

We strongly support their vision of an enhanced response to the community's data, knowledge and information-sharing needs. Their combined work will strengthen community outcomes by supporting focused planning for a stronger future."

Bryan Rose, Executive Director,
Niagara Community Foundation,
September 9, 2020

Age-Friendly Niagara Network
BCM Insurance
Brock University
Canadian Mental Health Association Niagara Branch
Canadian Open Data Summit
Centre de Sante Communautaire (Welland)
City of St. Catharines
Contact Niagara
Community Support Services of Niagara
Distress Centre Niagara
District School Board of Niagara
FACS Niagara
Family Health Teams in Niagara
GBF Community Services (Grimsby)
John Howard Society - Niagara
Niagara Catholic District School Board
Niagara Community Foundation
Niagara College
Niagara Falls Community Health Centre
Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre
Niagara Health
Niagara Region
Niagara Suicide Prevention Coalition
Pathstone Mental Health
PEPiN (Poverty & Employment Precarity in Niagara)
Positive Living Niagara
Quest Community Health Centre
Start Me Up Niagara/& Niagara Community Garden Network
Strong Fort Erie Neighbourhoods
Town of Lincoln
United Way Niagara





Photo courtesy of: Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority

Report measures and links to supporting data
and resources are available at

www.livinginniagarareport.com

