



Our perception of safety in our surroundings contributes to well-being, and helps us to be connected to others.

## What's Emerging

- Early evidence is showing that, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)-related risk factors increased, while protective factors decreased. ACEs are defined as stressful or traumatic events that occur in childhood (0–18) that have been found to increase the risk of engaging in health harming behaviours and developing chronic health problems.
- The Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW) in Niagara is mapping existing referral pathways between agencies working toward ending gender-based violence against all women, and their children. The intent is to create a more coordinated and integrated crisis system, improving overall access for individuals being served.
- The Niagara Regional Police Service is seeing a rise in criminal activity in Niagara, by Greater Toronto Area (GTA)-based street gangs. Transient gang members are involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, firearms-related offences, robberies and major assaults (e.g. drug house takeovers).
- Investment in mental health and trauma supports for those working on the front lines in agencies serving victims of crime is seen to be absolutely necessary, especially considering workloads and the complex issues being experienced by clients.

## Suggested Community Action Steps

- Incorporate the declaration of Intimate Partner Violence being an epidemic into the update of the Niagara Region Community Safety and Well-being Plan.
- Acknowledge that overall community safety is directly linked to poverty, and the effects of vulnerable individuals and families struggling to meet basic needs such as housing, food and mental health services.
- Focus on preventive measures in programming and responses. Acknowledge that we have more impact on crime prevention by aligning our work, and ensuring we are directly educating and providing supports for vulnerable people - e.g., provide human trafficking training to educators, to help children and youth learn how to safely use technology.
- Describe changes to volunteering brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the extent to which this has affected the work of agencies in our community.
- Address the challenge of adverse childhood experiences by providing programs and services for children and families that are affordable and accessible.
- Increase understanding of the impact of cultural diversity on interventions with families who are new Canadians. Build cultural competencies, and sensitivity to differences, into interventions.

## Indicators

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

## Happening Now

- Niagara continues to experience a high incidence of human trafficking, as an international and domestic tourist destination, with proximity to multiple international border crossings. In 2022, the Ontario Ministry of Education issued a directive for all school boards to establish and follow a protocol for response to suspected sex trafficking occurrences. The Niagara Region Emergency Human Trafficking Protocol, updated in 2023, maps out emergency services for those experiencing human trafficking in Niagara.
- In September, 2023, Niagara Region joined more than 47 municipalities in Ontario, in declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic. There were 62 femicides in Ontario in 2023, with 3 of those being in Niagara.
- A 2022 Red Dress Day article by Wendy Sturgeon of Niagara Chapter Native Women challenges allies of Indigenous groups to take action toward true reconciliation. Six of every ten Indigenous women will experience physical or sexual assault in their lifetime, from age 15 onward. A 2022 Statistics Canada report states that 56% of Indigenous women have experienced physical assault, compared to about 1/3 (34%) of non-Indigenous women; and 46% of Indigenous women have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime, compared to about 1/3 (33%) of non-Indigenous women.
- The 2021-2025 Niagara Region Community Safety and Well-being Plan aims to strengthen Niagara as a community where everyone is safe; has a sense of belonging; has access to services; and is able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income and cultural expression.
- A 2021 CAMH (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health) policy paper calls on governments for drug decriminalization; an increase in treatment and harm-reduction services; and replacement of the unregulated, toxic drug supply. In 2020, St. Catharines Council endorsed the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police recommendation for decriminalization of personal possession of illicit drugs; and Niagara Region Council asked the federal government to study decriminalization of all drugs for personal use.

