



Equitable, lifelong access to health and human services is essential for community well-being.

Happening Now

- A COVID-19 Evaluation Survey, completed June - October, 2021 by 6,528 Niagara region residents attending a Mass Immunization Clinic identified the top 3 problems in Niagara that impact safety and well-being: Mental Health, Addiction/ Substance misuse, and Affordable Housing.
- The Niagara Region Community Dashboard includes ten Health Indicators within the Community Well-Being category, with statistics about life expectancy; cancer, diabetes and smoking rates; opioid use; sense of belonging; and perceived mental health and overall health.
- In 2023, a total of 734 suspected opioid overdoses were responded to by Niagara Region Emergency Medical Services, compared to 663 in 2022 and 1,005 in 2021. There is an increased push for decriminalization, and safer supply.
- Evidence which connects health and well-being to current and future climate-related health risks focuses on healthy built environments, climate change mitigation and adaptation. Aspects include: health equity; exposure to extreme temperatures; air quality; active transportation; social cohesion; and the role of green infrastructure in reducing urban heat island effects and improving air and water quality.
- A 2022 project provided Trauma-Informed Care Training for workers with 15 Niagara community agencies. A survey of 24 agencies representing 2,000 employees and tens of thousands of clients in Niagara showed that the agencies believe that becoming more trauma-informed would make them more effective, and better able to engage clients and retain staff. The project arose from a partnership between the Canadian Mental Health Association Niagara Branch, Pen Financial Credit Union, Armstrong Strategy Group, and the University of Buffalo's Institute on Trauma-Informed Care.
- Distress Centre Niagara is the local service delivery partner for the new national 988 Suicide Crisis Helpline, launched in November, 2023 by CAMH (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health).
- In 2023, the Niagara HELPS program team won a McMaster University President's Award for Community-Engaged Research. Quest Community Health Centre, all three Niagara Health Emergency Departments (EDs) and other key partners work with Peer Support Navigators with lived experience of homelessness, who provide nonclinical assistance, supportive counselling, advocacy and referrals to individuals experiencing homelessness who are in EDs.



What's Emerging

- Strategic priorities of the Niagara Ontario Health Team (NOHT-ESON) include 6 pillars: Integrated care; Indigenous health; Safe and inclusive services; Primary care (timely/equitable access); Human resources; and Improving how NOHT-ESON members work together and measure progress/impact.
- Understanding of health equity and intersectionality in Niagara is informed by Niagara Priority Profiles provided by Niagara Region. Profile data includes: Age groups, Disabilities, Education, Ethno-racial and immigration, Homelessness, Indigenous, Linguistic communities, Low income, Religion, Rural and urban, Sex and gender.
- The shortage of 100 primary care doctors to meet the needs of residents is being felt across Niagara. The Ontario College of Family Physicians forecasts that 1 in 5 people in Ontario (3 million) will be without a family doctor by 2026.
- The health and wellness of community agency workers is being affected by the post-COVID combination of increased demand for health and human services, and volunteer numbers that are slow to build back.
- Demand persists for services to address mental health concerns for people of all ages. As of October 31, 2023, families seeking mental health services for children and youth under 18 living in Niagara can directly contact Pathstone Mental Health (PMH); and for immediate support, visit any of Pathstone's 10 in-person, Monday to Friday walk-in clinics across the region, or call the 24-7 Crisis & Support line: 1-800-263-4944.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Identify work already being done in Niagara to support vulnerable individuals to find appropriate care. Strengthen programs and systems navigation, coordinated access to services, and integrated care planning. Examine lessons learned in other parts of Ontario about taking a case management approach to reduce wait lists for services, and address immediate needs.
- Strengthen agencies' collective understanding of assets already in place, to provide phone and online access to health information in Niagara, such as the Mental Health and Addictions Access Line Niagara; Health 811; 211 Ontario; and Older Adult Infolink.
- Pay attention to intersectionality, and the importance of including diverse voices and perspectives in planning for service delivery.
- Reduce barriers for individuals seeking mental health services by increasing understanding of the mental health continuum. Do this to be specific in identifying resources to promote health and reduce disruption. Consider factors such as race, sexual orientation, social class, age, disability, gender and unique life experiences and stressors.
- Connect data systems, and integrate utilization of AI into support for health systems.
- Advocate, and raise awareness about compensation inequities between health care, public health, and community-based agencies. This relates to base budget increases. Limited resources make it difficult for community-based organizations to recruit and hire staff. Addressing inequities by taking a whole-community system approach to managing capacity will support health care system priorities to divert people away from hospitals, toward more appropriate, effective care provided in community settings.
- Considering the post-pandemic era of increased demand for community services and a general reduction in the number of people volunteering, provide support for care workers as the community continues to build back. These supports include trauma-informed care training, adequate wages, and support for workers' own well-being.

Indicators

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