

Critical Indicators for Reflecting on Life in Niagara



LIVING IN
NIAGARA
2023

Share Evidence. Exchange Knowledge. Plan Together. Build a Stronger Future.

About Niagara Connects

Niagara Connects is a community-driven knowledge-sharing and exchange network. We bring diverse people and organizations together to learn from and use reliable evidence. We take a cross-sectoral view of what's emerging in Niagara, and engage community partners in examining topics of common concern.

This supports focused, holistic planning and innovation for a stronger future.

Niagara Connects delivers two integrated evidence tools: the Living in Niagara (LIN) report and Niagara Knowledge Exchange (NKE).

Niagara Connects is part of Community Potential, a non-profit social enterprise. Together we envision a stronger community where everyone belongs. We strengthen communities through research, insight and actions that broaden the discourse on pressing, emerging and unaddressed issues and opportunities.

Get connected to the Niagara Connects network, by opting into the database at: niagaraknowledgeexchange.com/get-connected/ You will receive regular updates with quick links to Niagara-focused evidence posted to the NKE, and be informed about knowledge-sharing events.

Dedication

We dedicate this sixth Living in Niagara (LIN) report to the late Catherine Mindorff-Facca. Her visionary leadership and passion for combining reliable evidence with front-line community knowledge led to the founding of Niagara Connects.

The first LIN report was released in 2008, and the Niagara Knowledge Exchange was launched in 2012. As early as 2005, Catherine engaged leaders across the region in a shared vision to build a Niagara-wide, community-driven mechanism to support collaborative, evidence-informed planning, based on the Social Determinants of Health. The goal was to strengthen quality of life for individuals and families across the region.

Catherine was known for her insight, ability to see emerging patterns, and skill for translating reliable evidence into community action.

She understood the power of gathering authentic, on-the-ground voices to describe what would strengthen life in their community.

As a retired nurse and epidemiologist, and highly-skilled volunteer, Catherine spear-headed many initiatives which continue to have impact, both in her home community of Fort Erie, and across Niagara. In 2007, she was named the recipient of the T. Roy Adams Humanitarian of the Year Award by the Region of Niagara. The award honours a resident of Niagara who best exemplifies Roy's values and dedication to community service; a person who sees volunteerism as an integral part of their life.

Catherine was a bright, shining light, and was always ahead of her time. We are grateful to have known and worked with her.

Table of Contents

Sector Technical Documents

which include Measures for report Indicators, and links to supporting data and resources are available at

www.livinginniagarareport.com

Introduction	3	Economic Prosperity	13
UN Sustainability Goals	3	Environment	15
Report Methodology and Purpose	4	Health and Wellness	17
Acknowledgements	4	Housing and Shelter	19
Niagara: a community of communities!	5	Learning and Education	21
Niagara Region Population 1996-2021	5	Recreation and Sports	23
Niagara Region – Projected Growth	6	Transportation and Mobility	25
Overall Opportunities for Action	6	Work and Employment	27
Arts, Culture and Heritage	7	What We Heard in 2023	29
Community Belonging	9	Looking Forward	29
Community Safety	11	Niagara Connects Subscribers	30

The Living in Niagara symbol 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 within the Niagara region of Ontario.

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



Introduction

This sixth Living in Niagara report presents a snapshot of life in Niagara in 2023. Our community continues to stabilize and adjust, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The changing contexts being felt in every Living in Niagara Sector are reflected globally.

This report shows alignment between the Living in Niagara Sectors and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In 2015, the SDGs were adopted by all 193 UN Member States, including Canada. The 2030 Agenda sets out a 15-year plan to achieve the SDGs.

The SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. The 17 interconnected Goals include 169 targets and 232 individual indicators.

The five pillars of sustainable development include: **People; Planet; Prosperity; Peace; and Partnership.**

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Report Methodology and Purpose

Living in Niagara report construction methodology is evidence-informed and validated. The report is consistently described as being a valuable, unique, community-driven asset.

A diverse group of hundreds of people in Niagara engage in the ongoing knowledge-sharing which Niagara Connects facilitates. This exchange forms the basis of the Living in Niagara report, and serves to build up Niagara'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 report is utilized 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 community context.

Acknowledgements

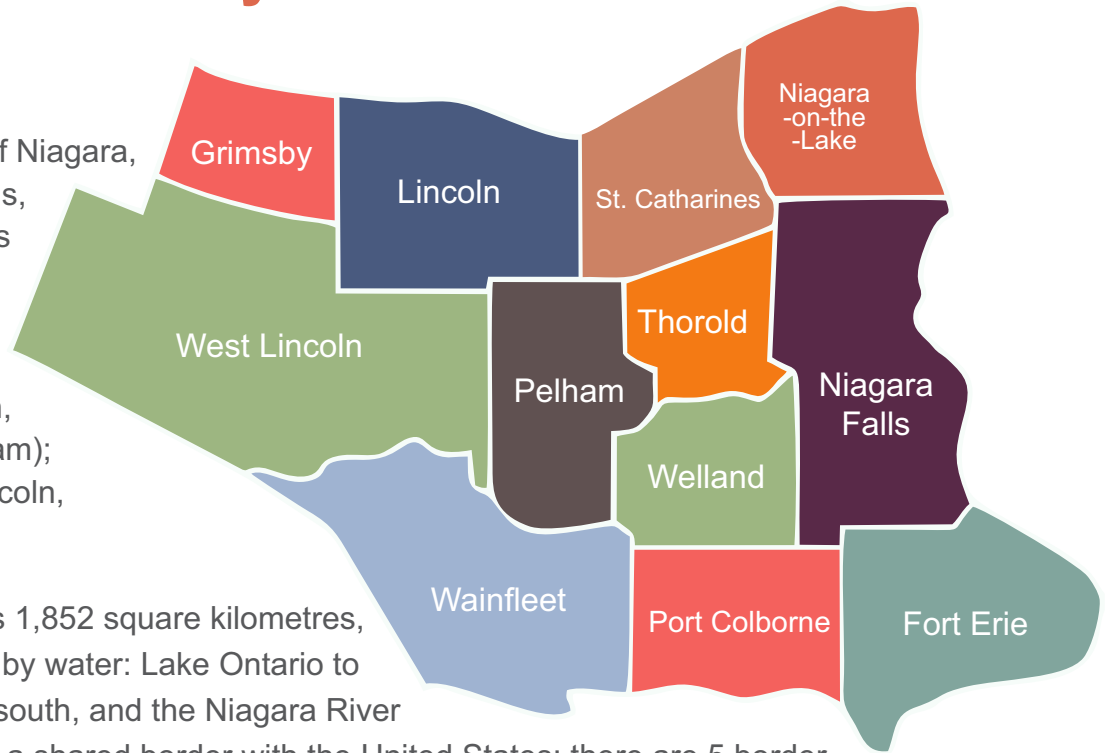
We acknowledge that the work of building this report is conducted on traditional territory of the Anishinaabe (Anii-shiinabee) and Haudenosaunee (Ha-dee-no-shoni) peoples, many of whom continue to live and work here today. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties and is within the land protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum agreement. Today, this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Métis 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, and all Niagara Connects Subscribers in making the community-driven work of the Living in Niagara report and the Niagara Knowledge Exchange possible.



Niagara: a community of communities!

Niagara is governed by 13 municipal governments: the Regional Municipality of Niagara, plus 12 municipality Councils, which locally govern 5 cities (St. Catharines, Welland, Niagara Falls, Thorold, Port Colborne); 5 Towns (Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham); and 2 Townships (West Lincoln, Wainfleet).



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).

Niagara Region Population 1996-2021

Municipality	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
Fort Erie	27,183	28,140	29,925	29,960	30,710	32,901
Grimsby	19,585	21,295	23,937	25,325	27,314	28,883
Lincoln	18,801	20,610	21,722	22,487	23,787	25,719
Niagara Falls	76,917	78,815	82,184	82,997	88,071	94,415
Niagara-on-the-Lake	13,238	13,840	14,587	15,400	17,511	19,088
Pelham	14,393	15,275	16,155	16,598	17,110	18,192
Port Colborne	18,451	18,450	18,599	18,424	18,306	20,033
St. Catharines	130,926	129,170	131,989	131,400	133,113	136,803
Thorold	17,883	18,045	18,224	17,931	18,801	23,816
Wainfleet	6,253	6,260	6,601	6,356	6,372	6,887
Welland	48,411	48,405	50,331	50,631	52,293	55,750
West Lincoln	11,513	12,265	13,167	13,837	14,500	15,454
Totals	403,554	410,574	427,421	431,346	447,888	477,941

Niagara Region – Projected Growth

2051 Population and Employment Forecasts by Local Area Municipality

The Niagara Region is planning to accommodate a minimum population of 694,000 people and 272,000 jobs by 2051.

This represents an increase of more than 200,000 people and 85,000 jobs compared to 2021.

Source: Niagara Official Plan, November 2022, Growing Region

Municipality	Population	Employment
Fort Erie	48,050	18,430
Grimsby	37,000	14,960
Lincoln	45,660	15,220
Niagara Falls	141,650	68,110
Niagara-on-the-Lake	28,900	17,610
Pelham	28,830	7,140
Port Colborne	23,230	7,550
St. Catharines	171,890	79,350
Thorold	39,690	12,510
Wainfleet	7,730	1,830
Welland	83,000	28,790
West Lincoln	38,370	10,480
Totals	694,000	272,000

Overall Opportunities for Action

1. The Niagara community is still building back after the COVID-19 pandemic, Inflation, cost of living, and a region-wide housing shortage are all having an effect.
2. Niagara continues to grow, and the makeup of the regional population is becoming increasingly diverse.
3. Mental health and addiction challenges persist, across all age groups in Niagara.
4. Working across sectors to address complex issues so that individuals and families have a safe, reliable, affordable and attainable place to call home has taken on new significance.
5. The time is now for people in Niagara to be engaged in seeing practical ways everyone can take action toward reducing climate impacts. The conversation has shifted from planning for the future, toward acting now. All socio-economic sectors are affected by the health of our environment.
6. Demand for health and community services, as well as recreation programming have significantly increased since the pandemic.
7. Volunteer patterns are changing, and numbers of volunteers are slow to build back after the pandemic. This is putting extra pressure on already-stretched agencies and their workers.
8. Intimate partner violence has been declared an epidemic in Niagara. Of 62 femicides in Ontario in 2023, 3 were in Niagara.
9. A rise in criminal activity by GTA-based street gangs is occurring in Niagara. Transient gang members are involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, firearms-related offences, robberies and major assaults.
10. Diverse voices of lived experience are being engaged to inform the work of agencies across the region. There is increased interest in agency workers building cultural competencies, gaining sensitivity to differences, and learning about trauma-informed care, so they can work more effectively with a changing population.





Arts, Culture and Heritage



Arts, Culture and Heritage assets serve and uphold basic human needs across all areas of civilization and the economy.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Happening Now

- The Lincoln and Pelham Public Libraries merged in 2022, as Lincoln Pelham Public Library, to share services, resources, programs and staff. A focus on technology, Makerspaces, and decreasing the digital divide is supported by a new Digital Strategies Librarian.
- The Living Library collection at the Niagara Falls Public Library brings voices of lived experience to inform the design and delivery of housing services in Niagara.
- The Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre produced a 3-part Indigenous Perspectives docuseries highlighting Indigenous history in Niagara. The Series is included in a new mandatory Indigenous Engagement course for all Niagara Region staff. The Region's health equity strategy includes a priority for meaningful, authentic engagement with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. This includes ensuring promotion and celebration of Indigenous cultural identities and heritage.
- In 2022, the Shaw Festival Theatre in Niagara-on-the-Lake marked its 60th anniversary, presenting performances, productions, concerts and shows in the community to an audience of 170,803. Add-on experiences, including 3,943 events, classes, workshops, and activities, engaged an additional 60,903 participants. The theatre has grown to be Niagara's largest cultural charity, and one of the 20 largest employers in the region. Every dollar spent with The Shaw leverages an average of \$7+ in local and regional spend (\$238,000,000). Hundreds of members of The Shaw Guild contribute thousands of volunteer hours toward Shaw Festival activities, and donate proceeds of fundraising efforts to The Shaw.
- In 2023, the annual Celebration of Nations gathering of Indigenous arts, culture and tradition received a national Cultural Event Award from the Creative City Network of Canada. The September event, held at the FirstOntario Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines, celebrates creativity, diversity and resilience.
- A 2021 Brock University policy brief emphasizes the importance of supporting arts organizations to rebound from the pandemic, citing their \$2 billion+ contribution, in direct and associated spending, to Niagara's economic and social well-being. The arts community is cited as "resilient and creative" in responding to pandemic challenges.
- Juno award winners and nominees from across Canada performed at 13 for 13 Culture Festival events held during the Niagara 2022 Canada Summer Games. Each of Niagara's 13 municipalities were paired with one of Canada's 13 provinces and territories, to showcase unique entertainment and culinary experiences.

COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

What's Emerging

- Performing arts organizations are taking longer to build back after the COVID-19 pandemic than anticipated. Operating costs, sponsorships, private sector fundraising, earned revenues and grants have all been affected. The Professional Association of Canadian Theatres notes that, while the overall culture sector accounts for 2.3% of Canada's GDP, the performing arts industry was among the hardest hit sectors nationally, and experienced the most stringent and longest-duration of restrictions globally.
- There is a focus on engaging people to return to attending live performances and in-person events. While the pandemic gave organizations the ability to present events virtually, engaging audiences in-person is a priority.
- Increased attention is being paid to the benefit that Niagara could derive from having an Arts Council organization. The role of Arts/Culture/Heritage in civic engagement and community building is not well-understood in Niagara, and the region lags behind comparator municipalities when it comes to investment in this sector.
- Volunteering patterns are changing. Volunteer Canada notes that Arts and Culture organizations have one of the highest rates of volunteer hours in the country (104 hours/year). Overall, 25% of volunteers see contributing to community well-being as a leading motivation for volunteering.
- The Rodman Art Institute of Niagara (RAIN) is engaging the community in examining options for a new public art gallery in the region. This builds upon Rodman Hall Art Centre's 60 years of work to steward a 1,000+ piece collection. Twenty per cent of the works in the collection are certified as Canadian Cultural Property, because they have been determined to be of significance to the nation.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Build upon evidence already gathered, to advance the culture sector in Niagara as a key element in the region's tourism industry and creative economy. A 2019 Niagara Community Observatory policy brief defines the culture sector as including occupations in the performing arts, spectator sports, heritage amenities, amusement and recreation activities.
- Encourage all municipalities in Niagara to invest in supporting local assets in the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector. Take a partnership approach to creating models that market beyond Niagara's signature events and sites. Market-ready product exists that requires support to stabilize, and to generate easily-secured 'additive tourism' among travellers already visiting the area.
- Gather organizations working in this sector, to identify opportunities to take collective action to demonstrate the role the sector plays in the socio-economic well-being and growth of the Niagara community.
- Examine and describe the current state of volunteering in the Arts, Culture and Heritage sector in Niagara.

Indicators

- **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



Individuals' sense of belonging and being connected is essential to a healthy community.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Happening Now

- Efforts to integrate services provided by settlement agencies with those offered by mainstream health and human services agencies is helping to bridge language and cultural barriers experienced by newcomers to Niagara.
- Voices of individuals with lived experience are being engaged, to inform planning and decision-making for delivery of health and community services in Niagara. In 2022, 1200+ older adults 50+ in Niagara completed an Age-Friendly Niagara Survey. Response themes include: supports to age in home; health/wellness promotion; importance of connected generations; and an increase in recreation/leisure/learning opportunities, housing options, and information about programs/services available to older adults.
- More than 3,600 volunteers in Niagara worked to make the 2022 Canada Summer Games a success, with 5,000+ athletes participating in 18 sports and 250+ events.
- The 2023 Niagara Region Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Action Plan is intended to support diverse community members to feel welcomed and included, leading to positive health and well-being for all residents and visitors. A resulting Community of Practice (CoP) will address DEI issues in the community by sharing resources, learning about DEI topics, and incorporating DEI into Human Resource practices.
- Voter turnout rates in Niagara in 2021 and 2022 for federal, provincial and municipal elections align with national and provincial rates.

COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

What's Emerging

- Increased emphasis is being put on intentionally reflecting the changing face of Niagara, by engaging diverse individuals in strengthening our community.
- Unprecedented demand on services, combined with a reduction in charitable giving is putting pressure on non-profit agencies and their workers.
- Various social prescribing approaches are underway, to strengthen health and well-being by reducing barriers for people to connect to meaningful activities in their communities.
- Shifts in volunteering patterns have led to organizations examining how they engage, support, train, communicate with, and empower their volunteer workforce.
- Strengthening digital literacy, access to the internet, and awareness of how social media shapes communication among people of all ages are increasingly seen as key to individuals' ability to connect with, and participate in their communities.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Identify ways to mitigate effects of increased demand on charitable and non-profit organizations, their staff and volunteer workforce.
- Continue to strengthen Niagara as an equitable, diverse, inclusive, welcoming community with opportunities for participation for all people.
- Encourage participation through a range of opportunities for individuals of all ages and interests, e.g., volunteering, coaching, intergenerational transfer of knowledge/exchange of skills, and opportunities to connect with others through events.
- Describe the current state of the volunteering landscape in Niagara. Do this to identify measurable ways to maximize the impact of volunteering, for both individual volunteers, and the organizations that are engaging volunteers in their work.
- Continue to encourage voter turnout rates in Niagara by supporting access to information and voting options, for vulnerable individuals.

Indicators

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





Community Safety



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

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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.

COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

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**





Economic Prosperity



Community prosperity spans the socio-economic sectors. It includes the vibrancy of our economy; and the well-being of the people who live here.

Happening Now



- The 2022 Niagara Official Plan projects, by 2051, a minimum population of 694,000 people, and 272,000 jobs. From 2016 to 2021, Niagara’s population grew by 6.7 per cent, compared to 5.8 per cent for Ontario. Related data is presented in the 25 Development, Employment and Growth Indicators in the Economy and business category of the Niagara Region Community Dashboard.
- Niagara’s 10 Year Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032 includes core industry sectors: Agriculture, Manufacturing, Tourism, and Professional Services (finance, technical, professional, scientific). Emerging sectors include: Health Care, Film Industry, Sport Tourism/Active Economy, Marine Sector, and Electrification/Clean Tech. Themes include: Consistent support for diversity/equity/inclusion; Education and workforce support; Investment attraction; Green development and sustainability; and Infrastructure and transportation.
- 2023 Ontario Chamber of Commerce Business Confidence Survey results show that business confidence is low, mainly due to cost of living, inflation, housing affordability, and cost of inputs. The survey received 1,857 responses, including 150 from the Hamilton-Niagara Peninsula area.
- A 2023 Workforce Collective report calls for a shift in the way our economy values the non-profit sector, which employs about 1 in 5 employed individuals in Niagara. The sector is working at over capacity, experiencing employee burnout, and facing labour market challenges. In 2020 in Niagara, there were approximately 1,521 active non-profit organizations employing approximately 38,833 people, primarily in the care economy - health, education and social services.
- 2022-2024 Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) priorities include: Children and Families; Housing and Homelessness; Food Security; Domestic Violence; Indigenous Wellbeing; and Living Wage. A comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy for Niagara will be launched in early 2024.



COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

What's Emerging

- Inflation effects are driving both an unprecedented increase in demand for services from Feed Niagara's ten partner food banks, and a reduction in charitable giving, at a time when one in five households (20.7%) in Niagara are food insecure.
- In 2023, Niagara Region Council called for upper-tier levels of government to launch a basic income guarantee project. This builds upon 2021 Niagara Food Security Network Lived Experience Engagement Report findings.
- Recognition is growing, that implementation of Niagara's Poverty Reduction Strategy will be enhanced by intentionally investing in strengthening the collaborative work of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network.
- Renewed attention is being paid to Niagara's workforce participation rate being lower than the average for Ontario.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Invest in strengthening the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network, to ensure that agencies are supported to collaboratively make a meaningful, measurable contribution to enacting the Niagara Region Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- Continue to prioritize equitable access to technology, the internet, and opportunities to acquire digital skills, for all people in Niagara.
- Emphasize the vital importance of equitable access to participate in our community and economy, for women and their families, and all equity-deserving groups.
- Examine ways that the Niagara Region Housing and Homelessness Action Plan can inform both economic development and workforce planning priorities for Niagara.
- Emphasize the significant contribution that non-profit, culture, and recreation and sport organizations play in Niagara's economy, and identify growth opportunities.

Indicators

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





Environment



It is essential for Niagara residents to see their role in ensuring a sustainable future, by protecting and restoring our natural assets; reducing and recycling household waste; and responding to climate impacts.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



COMMUNITY POTENTIAL

LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

Happening Now

- In 2021, the Niagara Community Foundation launched the \$5 million Dorothea Thomas Foundation endowment fund, directed exclusively to supporting environmental causes in Niagara.
- The Niagara Region Community Dashboard includes a total of seven Environment Indicators: Corporate building energy consumption; Residential solid waste diverted from disposal; Residential organics collected; Residential hazardous waste collected; Wastewater estimated to have bypassed all treatment; Treated wastewater; Emerald ash borer beetle tree remediation.
- In 2022, the Niagara Climate Change Action Network (NCCAN) was formed, to support and accelerate a progressive, collaborative, and equitable approach to addressing the effects of climate change in the Niagara region. A total of 51 NCCAN member organizations are working together, with a focus on: a pathway to net zero; biodiversity; and climate resilient infrastructure.
- Niagara Region Blue/Grey Box recycling collection services are evolving to a more circular economy model in January, 2024. Materials are collected, recycled and returned to producers, for use as recycled content in new products and packaging. Niagara Region maintains collection of: curbside garbage; large household items; organics (Green Bin); leaf and yard waste; and all materials from industrial, commercial and some institutional establishments.
- In 2023, the Niagara Geopark Trail Network was formed, as an outcome of the Niagara Geopark Trail Summit. The intent of Niagara Geopark is to share the rich geological and cultural layers of Ontario's Niagara Peninsula, through a sustainable tourism-oriented model.
- In 2021, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) released its 10-year strategic plan which identifies climate change as a critical priority. The plan includes numerous climate-related actions across six strategic priorities. The NPCA plays an important role in climate change mitigation and adaptation through its work in watershed-based natural resource management, water monitoring, flood forecasting and warning, floodplain mapping, sustainable development, ecosystem restoration and stewardship, shoreline coastal resiliency, land securement, and outreach/education.
- Niagara River Remedial Action Plan partners continue to make progress in improving the river's water quality and ecosystem health. In 2021, a Delisting Strategy for the Niagara River (ON) Area of Concern was completed, to guide actions for addressing remaining ecosystem impairments. An updated plan is underway in 2024.
- In 2023, the NPCA, in collaboration with Ontario Nature and Conservation Ontario, announced the addition of 11 local natural areas toward Canada's ambitious goal of protecting 30 per cent of its lands and waters by 2030. The 830 hectares encompassed in these areas play a critical role in the conservation of the local ecoregion and its characteristic species, including species at risk such as barn swallows, monarch butterflies and butternut trees.
- In 2022, the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Network (NEBN) incorporated in Ontario. NEBN supports the management of the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere as a community-led, grassroots organization, working to meet the criteria and standards required by United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Biosphere runs west from Niagara, and then north to Tobermory, extending some 725+ kilometres. Plenty Canada, an Indigenous non-governmental organization is partnering, nurturing, and assisting in NEBN's development, with support from Environment and Climate Change Canada.

What's Emerging

- Work is underway to build a Community Energy Plan for Niagara, drawing upon what was learned at the 2023 Niagara Climate Change Summit. The summit focused on energy resilience and advancing carbon reduction efforts, to inspire and encourage climate action. The intent is to transform what was learned at the summit into a plan for Niagara to manage its energy use, and transition toward more sustainable and efficient energy sources, with NCCAN playing an important role in shaping the plan.
- Many local municipalities in Niagara have created plans to improve climate resilience, address climate-related risks, reduce impacts of extreme weather events, and integrate climate change adaptation practices into their operations.
- Natural asset accounting initiatives are being led by several local municipalities and the NPCA. This involves evaluating local natural resources (e.g., wetlands, forest, meadows, etc.) and the communal benefits they offer, such as stormwater management, erosion prevention, air and water quality improvements, wildlife habitat, urban heat reduction, and recreation opportunities. Understanding and valuing these natural assets promotes data-informed decision-making when leaders seek to implement actions for managing more climate resilient communities.
- A variety of volunteer opportunities exist with several organizations doing work in the Environment Sector. For example, in 2023 the NPCA engaged a total of 846 active volunteers who contributed over 8,200 hours to support environmental programming, including the planting of 4 new pollinator gardens and participating in 51 stewardship events, such as tree plantings and invasive species removals within the Niagara Peninsula watershed.
- Food security is a topic of growing local and national concern. The Food Affordability in Niagara 2023 Nutritious Food Basket survey shows that approximately one in five households in Niagara are food insecure. More than half of Canadians are either very or extremely concerned about the impact that climate change could have on food security, according to a 2023 Dalhousie University Agri-Food Analytics Lab survey.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Emphasize that it is urgent for people in Niagara to take action to reduce climate and environment impacts. The conversation has shifted from planning for the future, toward acting now. “The great acceleration” of climate change is upon us, and the health of our environment is connected to all socio-economic sectors.
- Acknowledge that social inclusion and social justice are at the centre of people and communities taking action to deal with climate and environmental impacts.
- Enhance communication about, and mobilize knowledge to Niagara’s people and communities, to make them more aware of the state of the environment, and inspire them to take practical actions to deal with climate and environmental impacts.
- Encourage more community science and volunteerism to build baseline awareness about the environment in Niagara, spark a feeling of ownership, and inform local decision-making.

Indicators

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





Health & Wellness



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

Happening Now

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



- 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.

COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

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

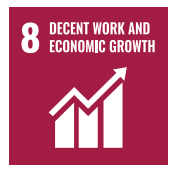


Housing and Shelter



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

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

Happening Now

- Niagara is experiencing a surge in housing demand, with forecasts projecting the need, by 2051, for 44,300 single and semi-detached units, 27,400 row and townhouse units, and 31,000 apartment units. The surge has resulted in increased housing costs, which raises concerns about affordability and sustainability.
- In 2023, Housing remained as the most-cited reason for people from Niagara contacting 211. A total of 21,261 calls were made to 211 from all local areas of Niagara in 2023.
- A new five-storey apartment building in Port Colborne, with 41 affordable homes for low-income seniors and female-led single parent households in South Niagara, is expected to be completed by the fall of 2024. This Port Cares affordable housing project is made possible through investment by the Government of Canada, Region of Niagara, City of Port Colborne, and charitable donations of Port Cares donors and supporters.
- Niagara Region is actively maintaining and managing its existing Community Housing stock, comprising 2,981 owned units, 3,354 housing provider units, and 1,400 rent supplement units. Initiatives like the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit contribute to ensuring housing stability for residents.
- Local municipalities and the Niagara Region are working together to take a multi-faceted approach to support new housing construction. This includes streamlining development approvals, and providing development incentives.
- A total of 51 corporations in Niagara are dedicated to providing affordable and community-driven housing solutions. Of these, 25 are non-profit corporations, which contribute 1,614 housing units to the region; and 26 are co-operative entities, which provide 1,552 housing units that foster a unique community-driven approach. The housing units span various types to cater to diverse resident needs: 2,079 apartments; 140 singles/semi-detached; and 947 townhouses.
- Built for Zero Canada progress indicators show that, as of December, 2023, there were 594 individuals who are chronically homeless in Niagara. This is an increase from 550 individuals in December, 2022 and 421 individuals on June 30, 2022
- Peer Support Navigators (individuals with lived experience of homelessness) are working in hospital Emergency Departments (EDs) in Niagara, to ease health systems navigation for individuals experiencing homelessness, and to help hospital ED staff to deepen their understanding of barriers faced by the homeless population.
- Twenty individuals who participated in 2023 lived expert advisory meetings hosted by Niagara Region provided ten recommendations for better addressing homelessness. These include: more barrier-free support for mental health, addictions and other health issues; additional support for victims of violence; meaningfully including individuals experiencing homelessness, to be a part of the solution; and public education to address misunderstanding and stigma.

What's Emerging

- Effects of inflation are driving an increase in demand for community services, for individuals and families to meet basic necessities. This is amplifying the vital importance of agencies working in partnership to address complex issues and take action so that individuals and families have a safe, reliable, affordable place to call home.
- The REACH Niagara Mobile Health Clinic is putting healthcare within reach for individuals experiencing homelessness or who are marginalized. Clinics are operated in partnership with organizations across Niagara, such as the Hope Centre (Welland); Southridge Shelter (St. Catharines); YWCA Niagara (St. Catharines); Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre; Port Cares (Port Colborne); and Birchway Niagara (Niagara Falls).
- It is important to continue the work being done in Niagara to successfully access both provincial and national funding to address homelessness issues in our communities.
- The Niagara Region Consolidated Housing Masterplan is part of the region's affordable housing strategy and guides the construction of new community housing units to 2045. The plan projects that 479 new community housing units per year are needed to meet anticipated demand by 2045. Co-investment with Federal, Provincial, Municipal, and other partners will be required to create this amount of new housing stock; and 8 specific projects are projected within the plan.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Increase availability of accessible, in-person mental health and addictions support for vulnerable tenants, with the recognition that this is essential for housing stability.
- Acknowledge the complexity of putting strategies in place for homelessness prevention, and the nuance required to find effective solutions.
- Increase investment in affordable housing:
 - Maintain current supply, e.g., by finding ways to purchase units and/or land that becomes available
 - Make housing units available that are truly affordable, based on household income
 - Provide supportive housing tied to mental health/addictions supports and physical supports
- Encourage increases in Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), Canada Pension Plan (CPP), and minimum wage, so that people living on low income can afford to have a safe, reliable home.
- Address policy gaps that are leading to an increase in evictions. Life in the post-pandemic period is less stable and more traumatizing for already vulnerable individuals, and the emotional burden of being evicted can be re-traumatizing.
- Investigate initiatives and funding opportunities that focus on co-operative models, which may lead to higher rates of people being able to retain their housing.

Indicators

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





Learning & Education



Accessible, inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities help people to grow, participate and prosper.



Happening Now



- The Niagara Children’s Planning Council shares learning about Infant Mental Health, and population level child development data for Niagara, gathered through the early years ASQ (Ages and Stages Questionnaire); and Early Development Instrument (EDI) kindergarten scores. In late 2023, the new Middle Development Instrument (MDI) self-report survey was administered for the first time to Niagara children in grades 4 and 7.
- The COVID pandemic accelerated government investment in internet access as critical infrastructure. By June, 2024, four SWIFT Broadband construction projects valued at \$21,218,445 will bring better connectivity to an additional 5,646 premises in areas of Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Fort Erie, Lincoln, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Wainfleet, West Lincoln and Grimsby.
- The focus on student mental health and wellbeing continues to rise. The provincial government is investing in school-based mental health supports; child and youth mental health is identified as important for life success; and post-secondary institutions are seeing ‘pandemic fatigue’ effects among students.
- Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and Assistants in Niagara earn only slightly above living wage. A 2022 Workforce Collective report shows that an Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) workforce strategy to strengthen access to quality childcare is essential for economic recovery, development and familial wellbeing. From now to the end of 2027, 9,146 children are on the waitlist of licensed childcare in Niagara. Both the demand and capacity exist to support at least 1,143 to 3,048 additional ECE jobs in Niagara.

COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

What's Emerging

- Initiatives to support equity, well-being and inclusion of all people are established in education institutions in Niagara. This prior work will inform the intent of the new Niagara Region Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Community of Practice (CoP), to address DEI issues in the community by sharing resources, learning about DEI topics, and incorporating DEI into Human Resource practices.
- Analyzed data from the 2023 MDI survey of grades 4 and 7 students in Niagara elementary schools will inform planning and decision-making to strengthen Niagara children's ability to meet age-appropriate developmental expectations.
- Post-secondary institutions' planning is being affected by broader community factors, including economic impacts of the pandemic, a shortage of attainable housing, shifting labour market demands, increased numbers of mature students looking to upskill, and changes to government policies for international student visas.
- Food security for students is an increasing concern for educators at all levels in Niagara.
- Awareness is increasing that young families' access to quality childcare is essential for economic recovery and development in Niagara; and that strategies to attract and retain ELCC workers should focus on wage increases and expanded access to quality professional learning opportunities.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Continue to strengthen mental health literacy for students of all ages, with a focus on mental health literacy skill-building; student engagement; technology capacity-building; and evidence-informed approaches.
- Continue to monitor Early Development Instrument (EDI) testing and Middle Development Instrument (MDI) survey results for Niagara.
- Pay attention to the proliferation of impacts of technology and automation on both current and future workers. Shifting labour market demands will require supports for workers to access upskill training.
- Support awareness-raising that Early Years learning is a necessary part of education; that investment in ELCC is important for the socio-economic wellbeing of Niagara; and that addressing an ELCC workforce strategy will help to attract and enable young families to work in the region.
- Focus on partnerships between school boards, post-secondary institutions, and industry groups. Do this to support raising students' and families' awareness about labour market demand, and the training opportunities available to help students gain insights into job opportunities.

Indicators

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





Recreation and Sports



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

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Happening Now

- From August 6 to 21, 2022, Niagara hosted the 28th Canada Summer Games. More than 5,000 athletes participated in 18 sports and 250+ events. More than 3,600 volunteers contributed 100,000+ hours to support the success of the Games; and 300,000+ spectators attended competitions, cultural festivals and ceremonies. The Games included an inaugural women's rugby competition, the return of men's lacrosse after a 37-year absence, and the first-ever women's lacrosse competition in the history of the Canada Games. This marked the third time in history, and the first time in 21 years, that the event has taken place in the province of Ontario.
- In 2022, the Centre for Sport Capacity at Brock University described work underway to inventory the breadth of diverse sport and sport tourism activity in Niagara, including participation, number of organizations, events, facilities and how they are driving economic activity. This inventory is informing legacy activities of the Canada 2022 Summer Games.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Active Niagara Network of municipal parks and recreation directors held frequent virtual meetings, to address the volume of decision points required to navigate restrictions on programs and facilities. As service delivery re-opened, network meetings focused on meeting pent-up demand, and matching skilled labour with that demand.
- A 2021 Brock University policy brief cites the health benefits of positioning parks and recreation as an essential service. The COVID-19 pandemic period raised awareness of the importance of people having equitable access to recreation experiences.
- The 2023 Sport for Life Summit hosted in Niagara highlighted the importance of aligning sport policies, programs and resources to engage diverse communities in benefiting from equitable access to quality sport programming and physical literacy development.
- Older Adult Infolink is an online tool launched in 2021 by the Age-Friendly Niagara Council. It draws on 211 Ontario data, to allow for easier, enhanced, more centralized access to information about community services, for older adults in Niagara. It also links to Recreation program details provided by each of Niagara's 12 local municipalities.

COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

What's Emerging

- Municipal recreation departments have noticed a marked increase in program participation levels, since the COVID-19 pandemic. This presents challenges for Niagara's local communities to be able to provide equitably accessible opportunities to participate. The challenge exists in terms of both present-day capacity; and future demand, based on population growth projections as well as provincial priorities for increased housing builds.
- The Niagara Geopark Trail Network is being formed, as an outcome of the June, 2023, Niagara Geopark Trail Summit. The summit highlighted the importance of Niagara's trail systems, and how access to trails can draw both locals and visitors to areas of natural, Indigenous and local significance.
- Awareness is increasing about the lifelong importance of people being outdoors and having access to connect with nature. This was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic experience.
- Organizations across Niagara and beyond are seeing a shift in volunteering patterns. This trend is being closely watched by people working in recreation and sports.
- There is increasing cross-over of recreation and active living programs with the health and wellness sector in Niagara. Exercise programs are being offered by primary care Family Health Teams and Community Health Centres; municipal recreation departments are seeing program participation referrals from health professionals; and several local municipalities have Active Transportation or Active Living Advisory Committees.
- The 2022 Niagara Active Economy Report outlines a 10-sector ecosystem where the organized sport, active recreation, and active tourism sectors serve a key role in generating community value. This cluster model is now part of Niagara Region's 10-year Economic Development Strategy.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Acknowledge the benefits of innovative programming structures that have arisen from changes brought about during the pandemic period. These include safety protocols and accessible online programming.
- Work collaboratively across sectors in Niagara, to help engage people moving to the region, including those arriving as newcomers to Canada, in recreation and sport opportunities in our community.
- Invest in recreation and sport infrastructure in Niagara, to meet increasing demand for access to programs and facilities. Monitor provincial legislation that may benefit or inhibit putting the necessary infrastructure in place.
- Pay attention to workforce sustainability in the sector by creating jobs for young people to stock and restock the field, and to ensure we have workers to meet demand created by provincial policy priorities for projected home builds in Ontario.
- Expand on work already underway to develop the Active Economy model for Niagara.

Indicators

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





Transportation and Mobility



People having equitable access to a range of affordable, sustainable transportation choices; and ease of movement of people and goods are essential for quality of life.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Happening Now

- In January 2023, Niagara Region Transit assumed responsibility for transit routes and services in Niagara. As part of the transition to unified transit, funding for the system shifted from local municipality budgets to a designated levy through Niagara Region. Establishment of a Niagara-wide transit system is seen to be beneficial for inclusion, equity, the economy and the environment.
- OnDemand Transit is a component of the Niagara Region Transit system. It is available in Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, Wainfleet and West Lincoln, with other service delivery models available in Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Thorold, St. Catharines and Welland, primarily in areas not currently covered by fixed transit routes. Riders can request trips in real-time through an app or over the phone by selecting a pickup point and destination.
- Transit ridership in Niagara reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily due to post-secondary institutions holding classes almost entirely online. Niagara Region estimates that, by the end of 2021, ridership had fallen to approximately 25% of 2019 levels. To date, ridership has seen a considerable rebound, reaching 95% of pre-COVID ridership levels.
- GO Transit train service to Niagara Falls is available 7 days a week, and GO train service to the St. Catharines VIA station has resumed.
- The Road Closures in Niagara web page provides a full list of road closures in the Niagara Region; and the information can also be mapped on Municipal511.
- Active Transportation and Active Living Advisory Committees in local municipalities in Niagara advise on active transportation 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.
- More than 1,680 businesses are certified as bicycle friendly by Ontario By Bike. The 2023 Ontario Cycle Tourism's Cycling Activity Report shows that cycle tourism is growing in Ontario, and is making a valuable contribution to the tourism economy.
- In 2023, the St. Catharines Downtown Association was certified as a bicycle-friendly business area within the Ontario By Bike Network, the first such organization in Niagara to be designated.

COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

What's Emerging

- The investment required to maintain the Niagara-wide transit system is being affected by inflation, an aging vehicle fleet and escalating fuel costs.
- Collision data for Niagara shows that the total number of collisions is increasing on our roads. The Niagara Region Vision Zero Road Safety Initiative aims to improve road safety for all users, through four automated speed enforcement units, being rotated through Niagara's community safety zones on Regional roads. Each unit will remain in place for approximately 90 days before being rotated to the next location. In 2023, automated speed enforcement cameras were set up to rotate near schools throughout the region.
- A number of local area municipalities in Niagara are working on either updating, or developing their Active Transportation or Transportation Master Plans. The plans include a growing focus on active and multi-modal transportation throughout the region.
- Interest in cycling in Niagara is growing, among local residents and tourists alike. Several trails, including the Greater Niagara Circle Route and Greenbelt Route are promoted on the Niagara Region Cycling Map. Information about cycling clubs, associations and committees in Niagara is provided on the Niagara Region website.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Examine, and build upon synergies between planning which focuses on transportation, complete streets, active transportation, Age-Friendly Communities, Community Well-Being, Equity/Diversity/Inclusion, the Active and Safe Routes to School program, and the work of the Niagara Climate Change Action Network.
- Emphasize the importance of a highly-efficient, safe, accessible, multi-modal transportation system that connects rural and urban municipalities as Niagara continues to grow.
- Be mindful of who is using transit when setting fees. Affordability is a key to making transit ridership accessible.
- Continue to promote the importance, across Niagara of: Improving safety on Regional roads; Reducing vehicular speeds; Encouraging compliance with speed limits; Reducing collisions resulting in fatalities and severe injuries; and Supporting walkable and safe communities.

Indicators

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





Work and Employment



Jobseekers' access to quality jobs, workers' ability to make a living wage, and employers' ability to match jobs available with employees' skills are essential to a growing Niagara



Happening Now



- The 2023 Living Wage Calculation for the Niagara region is \$20.35/hour, a 2.8% increase from \$19.80/hour in 2022. The estimated 2021 Cost of Living in Niagara for a reference household of 4 (2 parents, 2 children) totalled \$74,984. For 2023, the Living Wage Calculation provides expenses for three household types (Family of four; Single adult; Single parent).
- In November, 2023, there were 91 Living Wage Employers across Niagara, among a total of 628 in Ontario. Results of a survey of Certified Living Wage Employers in Niagara and their employees show that the Living Wage program has positively impacted workplace culture and sta ffrrelationships.
- The Workforce Collective 2023-24 Labour Market Report highlights employment and local job demand trends, including:
 - As of June, 2023 there were about 13,397 businesses with employees (including non-profits and registered charities). Of these, about 98% have fewer than 100 employees. There were also 28,748 self-employed individuals.
 - As of 2021, 83,005 immigrants lived in Niagara. In 2022, net international migration was the main source of population growth, a trend expected to continue over the next 5 years.
 - The proportion of youth (aged 15-24) in Niagara fell by 2.5% between 2016 and 2021. Workforce strategies such as job creation are critical to retain and attract young people.
 - The Conference Board of Canada expects that, by 2025, as spending increases in the services and tourism sector in Niagara, it should help employment recovery.
 - Strategies to support workers and employers in the caring economy (childcare, non-profits in health care, education and social assistance); and in immigrant employment will help to strengthen employment outcomes for Niagara.
- Crisis-level labour shortages and sta ffburnout are being experienced in Niagara's non-profit sector, according to a 2023 Workforce Collective brief. Non-profit and charitable organizations employ more than 1 in 5 people in Niagara. Nationally, the sector contributes about 8.4% of Canada's GDP.

COMMUNITY POTENTIAL



LIVING IN NIAGARA REPORT 2023

What's Emerging

- Attention is being paid to ensuring all individuals in Niagara have meaningful opportunities to contribute, through equitable access to decent work (inclusive of fair wages, secure work arrangements, and meaningful career advancement).
- A new Workforce Coalition is being formed, to integrate workforce planning and development efforts across the Niagara region. Members include Workforce Collective, local municipalities (including economic development teams), community services, industry associates, and education providers. The intent is to enable decent work, share information and data, and engage in proactive and strategic workforce-related activities.
- Awareness is rising that an unprecedented level of demand is being experienced by Niagara's community services agencies. Several compounding factors are affecting agencies in varying ways: worker burnout, labour shortages, volunteer numbers slow to rebound post-pandemic, and inflation affecting charitable donations.

Suggested Community Action Steps

- Strengthen synergies between settlement service providers and other social service agencies, to ensure that newcomers to Niagara are able to equitably access the supports they need, as well as the employment opportunities that are available.
- Emphasize the importance of intentional multi-disciplinary collaborative actions to advance the success of both Niagara's workforce and employers.
- Acknowledge that hybrid work models help to maximize opportunities for all those who want to participate in the workforce. Having the option to work remotely can remove barriers to workforce participation, and create opportunities to have an inclusive workforce.
- Recognize the contribution that nonprofit organizations make to Niagara's economy, the value they bring as employers, and the essential role their workforce plays in sustaining community well-being.

Indicators

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



What We Heard in 2023

Through 2023 interviews with Subscribers and community partners, we heard what they see as the unique value-add that Niagara Connects brings to the work of strengthening quality of life across the region.

- Community-led
- Connector across sectors and communities
- Observer of what's emerging in and across Niagara - 'bird's eye view' complements 'on the ground view'
- Trusted facilitator of community-driven knowledge-sharing
- Reliable source of Niagara-focused evidence, tools, and curated knowledge
- Bring a helpful, fresh perspective
- Building upon a rich history and trusted relationships
- Backbone Support services provide deeply-valued support for under-resourced initiatives

Looking Forward

In January, 2024, Niagara Connects joined Community Potential, a non-profit social enterprise formed in partnership with Armstrong Strategy Group. With increased capacity to support the evidence-and knowledge-sharing needs of organizations in Niagara, we will continue to strengthen quality of life for people living in Niagara.

“The Niagara Community Foundation is excited to see Niagara Connects and Community Potential aligning resources and building capacity to strengthen Niagara’s community knowledge assets. We strongly support their work of engaging people in diverse sectors to gather, share, and learn from evidence to inform collective action. Their combined efforts will strengthen community outcomes by enhancing focused planning that reflects changing contexts.”

Bryan Rose, Executive Director, Niagara Community Foundation, November, 2023



Niagara Connects Subscribers

Thank you to the Subscribers who invested in the work of Niagara Connects over the past 3 years. They are leaders in building a Niagara-wide culture of collaborative, evidence-informed planning for community action.

BCM Insurance

Brock University

Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara

CEVAW (Coalition to End Violence Against Women)

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Niagara Branch

Contact Niagara

FACS Niagara

GBF Community Services

Niagara College

Niagara Community Foundation

Niagara Falls Community Health Centre

Niagara Health

Niagara Region

Niagara Suicide Prevention Coalition

Niagara Youth Wellness Hub

Pathstone Mental Health

Positive Living Niagara

Quest Community Health Centre

Start Me Up Niagara

Strong Fort Erie Neighbourhoods

United Way Niagara

Welland Heritage Council
and Multicultural Centre



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

livinginniagarareport.com

