



## 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](http://www.livinginniagarareport.com)

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