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# NIAGARA'S COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING PLAN

## 2021-2025

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

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## On behalf of the Advisory Committee, we are pleased to present Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan.

Community safety and well-being planning is about more than just preventing crime or responding to a crisis. It is about breaking down silos and using multi-sectoral partnerships to address community needs. It is about looking upstream to find ways to reduce the need for crisis responses in the first place. Ultimately, it's about improving safety and well-being for all who live in Niagara, over the long term.

The Community Safety and Well-Being Plan allows us to be responsive, adapt to the needs of residents and use data to make evidence-informed decisions. While evidence has shown that existing health and social inequities are typically worsened during a pandemic – we sought to understand what this has really looked like in Niagara over the past year. By engaging with residents and community partners, we have heard first-hand how the pandemic and its associated measures have had

disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations. Our Community Safety and Well-Being Plan reflects what we've heard from the community and sets forward a plan that addresses four areas of focus: mental health and addictions, housing and homelessness, poverty and income, and systemic discrimination in Niagara, and identifies opportunities that can come from working collectively to address these complex issues.

Beyond the legislative requirement, this Community Safety and Well-Being Plan is an opportunity to work together to accomplish shared goals and keep our community safe and healthy. This Plan can guide planning and prioritization, evolve and adapt over time to continue to respond to emerging issues, and identify and champion innovative solutions to complex challenges.

We sincerely thank the many community partners, staff, residents, and those with lived experience that have come together to inform and develop this Plan. We're looking forward to working collaboratively alongside the community to accomplish our shared goals and continue to enhance safety and well-being across Niagara.



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**Ron Tripp,**  
Acting Chief  
Administrative Officer,  
Niagara Region



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**Chief Bryan MacCulloch,**  
Niagara Regional Police Service

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Acknowledgements _____	4
Introduction _____	5
Community Safety and Well-Being Planning in Ontario__	6
Our Approach _____	8
Community Consultation _____	9
Areas of Focus _____	10
Moving Forward _____	14
Appendix _____	15
References _____	15



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the region of Niagara is situated upon traditional territory of Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe. The Territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, and agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, The Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the land and resources around the Great Lakes. Subsequent Indigenous Nations and peoples, Europeans and all newcomers, have been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect.

Today, these remain home to many Indigenous Peoples and we are grateful for the opportunity to work with communities across this territory.

We acknowledge our responsibility to honour and respect the inherent and Treaty Rights of all Indigenous Peoples across this land, and our responsibility to understand how we can move forward the Calls To Action identified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

It is with gratitude that we would like to acknowledge and thank the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe for sharing their traditional territory with us, and commit to building relationships and taking action to advance true reconciliation that will forge a brighter future for all Indigenous Peoples in Niagara.

## Advisory Committee

We would like to thank Advisory Committee members that have guided the development of our Community Safety and Well-being Plan and its collective vision for action.

- Brock University
- City of Niagara Falls
- City of St. Catharines
- Contact Niagara
- District School Board of Niagara
- Entité2 (French Language Health Planning Entity)
- Family and Children's Services Niagara
- Gillian's Place
- Greater Niagara Chamber of Commerce
- Niagara Catholic District School Board
- Niagara College
- Niagara Indigenous Community Executives
- Niagara Community Legal Clinic
- Niagara Health
- Niagara Medical Group Family Health Team
- Niagara Region
  - Chief Administrative Officer
  - Community Services
  - Public Health
- Niagara Regional Police Service
- Positive Living Niagara
- Region of Niagara Police Services Board
- The RAFT
- Township of West Lincoln
- YMCA

# INTRODUCTION

Niagara is a beautiful and safe place to raise a family, work, study or retire, with a favourable cost of living. Compared to similar jurisdictions in Ontario, Niagara is performing well on a number of overall indicators of well-being and has opportunities to improve.

Niagara has seen consistent population growth over the past decade. In the next 30 years, Niagara is forecasted to gain 182,000 new residents. This represents a 37% increase between 2021 and 2051.<sup>1</sup> Niagara also has an aging population, and is home to more seniors than youth. The median age in Niagara is 45.7 years compared to the provincial average of 41.3 years.<sup>2</sup>

In relation to safety, Niagara typically ranks similar to or lower than other comparable municipalities when it comes to the volume and severity level of police-reported crime across our GTHA counterparts (measured through the Crime Severity Index<sup>3</sup>). In particular, Niagara has much lower levels of violent crime than most other regions across Ontario and across Canada (Niagara: 56.8 vs. Provincial Average: 74.9 / National Average: 89.7).

As Niagara continues to grow and our population changes, it is important to ensure strong levels of safety and continue to enhance the well-being of residents and communities that are vulnerable due to social, economic or health related risk factors. A key step in addressing issues is the development of Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan.

This approach to planning recognizes that complex risks to safety and well-being cannot be addressed in isolation by any one organization or sector. Too often, situations rooted in issues like mental health, addictions, a lack of safe and affordable housing, inadequate access to services or social isolation require an emergency response from the police, paramedics, hospital emergency department or other crisis-driven services. In many cases, these issues could be addressed earlier and more effectively through greater collaboration among sectors including police, paramedics, education, public health, healthcare, social services and community-based agencies. Community safety and well-being planning is a collaborative process that ensures people are connected with the right service, at the right time, through the right provider.

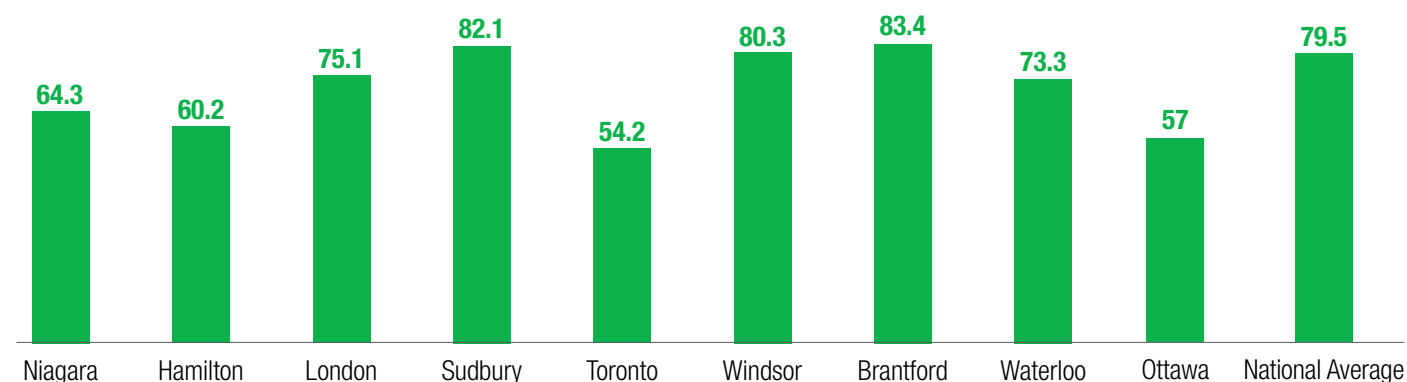
Niagara's Plan will strengthen how we collaborate with our partners on important issues that impact safety and well-being in Niagara. Specifically, it provides a planning framework for collaboration, planning and action and shapes how we identify and respond to current and emerging issues through ongoing engagement with community stakeholders.



## THE MAJORITY OF CALLS TO POLICE ARE NON-CRIMINAL IN NATURE

These calls are often rooted in complex mental health or social issues, many of which could be dealt with more effectively outside of the emergency response system.

## Total Crime Severity Index (CSI), 2019



# COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING PLANNING IN ONTARIO

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Beginning in 2009, the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services identified that police services were frequently responding to crisis situations that were non-criminal in nature. These findings were consistent across Ontario, and identified a need for a more collaborative service delivery model to prioritize local needs to improve safety and well-being.

A series of provincial reports were released, culminating with the Community Safety and Well-Being Planning Framework in 2017.<sup>4</sup>

Community safety and well-being plans are important to support safe and healthy communities through a more strategic, community-based approach to address root causes of social issues. This approach recognizes that safety and well-being cannot be addressed in isolation by any one organization or sector.

## Planning Framework

The planning framework is designed to coordinate an innovative, multi-sector approach which encourages planning in four zones of intervention.

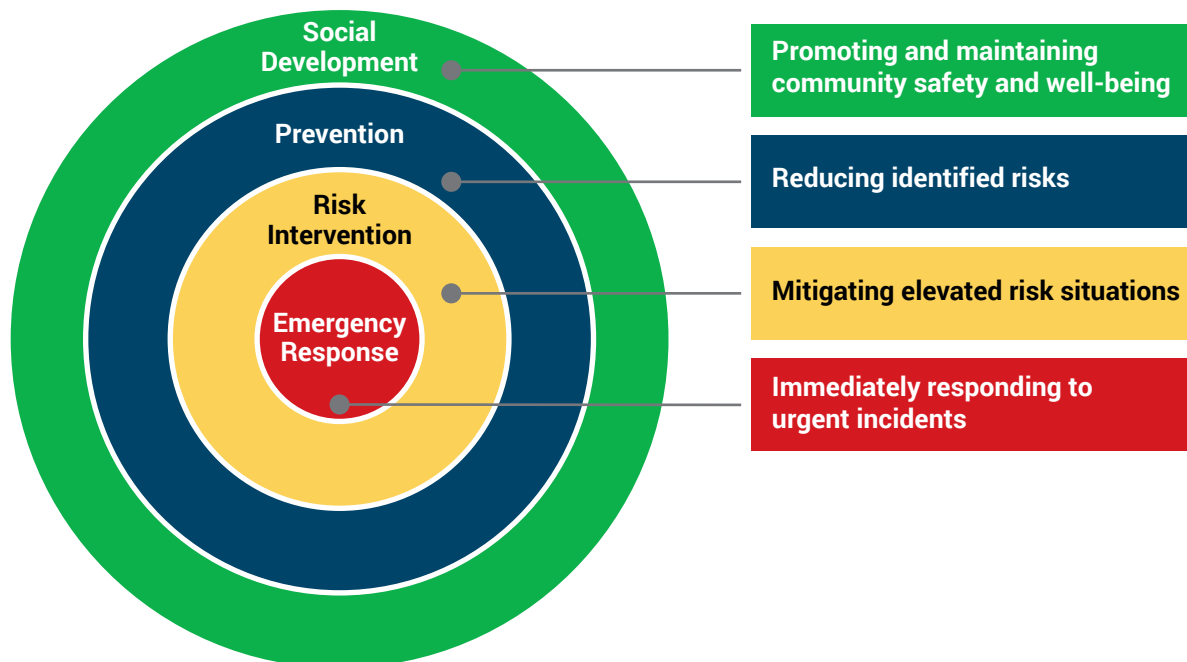
**Social Development:** Addressing the underlying causes of social issues through upstream approaches that promote and maintain individual and community wellness.

**Prevention:** Applying proactive strategies to known and identified risks that are likely to result in harm to individuals or communities if left unmitigated.

**Risk Intervention:** Identifying and responding to situations of acutely elevated risk and mobilizing immediate interventions before an emergency or crisis-driven response is required.

**Emergency Response:** Circumstances that require intervention by first responders such as police, paramedics and other crisis-driven services.

The approach to community safety and well-being focuses planning in the outer zones to reduce harm, crime or victimization of individuals by meeting their needs before escalation to crisis, and prevent more costly emergency response interventions. Developing strategies that are preventative as opposed to reactive will ensure efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of service delivery.



# OUR APPROACH

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Community safety and well-being is broad and multi-faceted. A combination of research, a review of existing data and community reports, and input from system leaders and community stakeholders was used to identify where to focus collaborative efforts for this first iteration of the plan. Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan was guided by a number of planning principles which are critical to its success, ensuring that the Plan is:

- Informed by local needs and leverages best practices
- Premised on cross-sector partnerships
- Strengths-based and identifies community assets
- Seeks opportunities for integrated planning using a lifespan approach
- Promotes aligning of investment
- Focuses on upstream / prevention-based approaches

## The process to develop Niagara's initial plan included:

- Reviewing existing Community Safety and Well-Being Plans in Ontario
- Examining local data and trends in service access and demand to allow for evidence-based decision-making – including pandemic-related trends
- Reviewing existing strategies and community-based assets across the four levels of intervention
- (Incident response, risk intervention, prevention and social development)
- Completing stakeholder consultations with community partners, residents and those with lived experience

Niagara's Community Safety and Well-being Plan is an iterative community plan that will be updated every four years and reviewed annually.

## Niagara Region's Approach





# COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

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Consultations sought to collaborate with participants in determining local safety and well-being priorities, and identifying strengths and opportunities.

Engagement sessions were held with communities which represent diverse perspectives and experiences in the planning process, from youth to seniors, community organizations to business operators, and from those who live across the region.

Community consultation leveraged existing planning tables, advisory groups, neighbourhood associations, and other networks to further enhance partnerships and collaboration. Populations who may be disproportionately impacted by the Plan (e.g. those who access mental health and addictions services) and those who are historically underrepresented within public engagement, were prioritized for engagement and where possible, barriers to participation reduced.

## Phase 1

**Between February and March 2020, in-person and virtual consultations resulted in feedback from over:**

- **150 staff from across 70 different organizations**
- **85+ clients or advisors from across 8 lived experience or client advisory groups**
- **In addition to focus groups, 1,279 residents completed an online survey to provide input into the Plan**

**The Interim Report on Community Consultation can was created to show these findings.<sup>5</sup>**

## Phase 2

**Between January 2021 to March 2021, 13 additional virtual consultations were held to gather feedback from more than 75 people.**

**During the pandemic, consultations were held virtually. A full list of focus groups can be found in Appendix 1.**

## **Mno Bmaadziwin: Community Safety and Well-Being Indigenous Engagement Report, 2021**

Critical to the development of Niagara's Community Safety And Well-Being Plan was ensuring that safety and well-being priorities reflect and are shaped by the voices and lived experiences of Indigenous peoples.

We are grateful to Niagara Chapter of Native Women (lead agency) and N.I.C.E. (Niagara Indigenous Community Executives), who worked alongside staff to provide opportunities for off-reserve Indigenous peoples to share their perspectives on safety and well-being while living in the Niagara region.

The recommendations and report findings were based on feedback collected over five sessions offered between February 16 and March 4, 2021.<sup>6</sup>

## **Engagement with Francophone residents and service providers**

A special thank-you to Entité2, CERF Niagara and Venture Niagara who coordinated engagement with the Niagara Francophone Interagency Table, along with staff from Centre de santé who participated in a dedicated focus group for those involved in providing French language health services. Additional feedback was provided in French from local residents through the public survey.

# AREAS OF FOCUS

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The Advisory Committee completed a process of issue identification and prioritization, using feedback from the community consultation phase as a key input.

The following issues have been identified for action, alignment or monitoring within four areas of focus: mental health and addictions, housing and homelessness, poverty and income, and systemic discrimination in Niagara.



## Action

Initiatives which require new Action Tables, comprised of representatives from community partner organizations, and provided with guidance and expertise from the Advisory Committee.

### **1 Streamline and coordinate rapid response outreach services to individuals with mental health and addictions and/or experiencing homelessness.**

Review the current state of outreach efforts in Niagara to identify gaps and opportunities for enhanced coordination across community partners. With multiple community-based assets which address urgent calls for service – i.e. Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team (MCRRT), Mental Health and Addictions Response Team (MHART), Niagara Assertive Street Outreach (NASO), Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST), etc., there is a need for improved coordination and integrated planning. Progress related to work of this Action Table will be regularly reported to, and contribute to shared goals identified by, the Community Safety and Well-Being Advisory Committee and the Niagara Ontario Health Team.

### **2 Implement recommendations found within Mno Bmaadziwin (Living the Good and Healthy Life) Indigenous Engagement Report.**

Adopt recommendations as a first step in working with Indigenous communities to develop a plan to ensure safety, equity and access to opportunity for Indigenous people in Niagara. The recommendations respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action<sup>7</sup> and emphasize that reconciliation cannot take place without truth-telling – or a sincere acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Indigenous people. This work is the basis for establishing new relationships with local Indigenous leaders embedded in mutual recognition and respect.

### **3 Expand the Situation Table model beyond Port Colborne based on trends related to calls to police which are non-criminal in nature.**

In February 2018, the Niagara Regional Police Service along with several community agencies launched “Port-All”, the first Situation Table in the Niagara region. Based on the successful outcomes of Port-All and continued need for evidence-based risk intervention models, the Situation Table model will be expanded to ensure more individuals at risk of victimization and/or harm are connected to a service providers before an incident occurs.

## Align

Pre-existing initiatives viewed as critical to enhancing community safety and well-being, which align with the goals of Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan.

### **1** Improve access to high-quality, evidence-based services aligned with the mental health and addictions core services framework.

The Niagara Ontario Health Team has begun to map critical service gaps across the continuum of need within mental health and addictions services. This work will support the expansion of priority programs with a focus on community-based services. Of particular interest to Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being planning is the current state and future planning associated with early intervention services. This service area has an upstream focus, helps to divert people from hospital admission, and has one of the highest rates of return of any mental health spending.

### **2** Address opioid misuse in Niagara through cross-sector collaboration.

Opioid use is a complex issue that requires the involvement of multiple agencies across different sectors, levels of government and the community. The Overdose Prevention and Education Network of Niagara (OPENN) seeks to address increased substance use, raise awareness around the increase in opioid overdoses, and consists of members from prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement. In 2020, there was a 25% increase in EMS calls for suspected opioid overdose compared to 2019.<sup>8</sup> OPENN remains well-positioned to continue monitoring trends and prevent further increases in opioid misuse in the region.

### **3** Create a coordinated access system for those experiencing homelessness.

In 2020, shelter occupancy rates, average length of stay and numbers of unique individuals who have entered the shelter system were down (from 10-17%) compared to 2019 levels.<sup>9</sup> This may be largely the result of the eviction moratorium passed during the pandemic. With record housing sales and a tightening of market conditions, support for those experiencing homelessness remains top of mind for many living in Niagara. As part of the Built for Zero campaign, the homeless-serving sector is working towards a coordinated access system that connects people to the right housing and supports. Coordinated access includes a centralized model of intake and referral, a common assessment tool and real-time data sharing, and will be critical to ending chronic homelessness.

### **4** Support a long-term economic development strategy (including post-pandemic recovery) which seeks opportunities to advance gender equality and inclusion.

Between February and March 2020, 31,000 Niagara residents lost employment (15.6% of total employed residents).<sup>10</sup> Women lost employment at a ratio of about 2:1 compared to men in Niagara, and are experiencing a slower employment recovery.<sup>11</sup> Work is already underway to consult with key stakeholders to ensure a long term economic development strategy considers the role of affordable, quality childcare, measures and reports on women's participation rates, and identifies opportunities to increase inclusion.

## **5 Develop a local Poverty Reduction Strategy which sets local targets and aligns investments to measurably reduce poverty.**

14.5% of Niagara residents have incomes below the after-tax Low Income Measure (LIM). In February 2021, Brock University released research findings which evaluated the state of poverty in Niagara, provided analysis on the impacts, outcomes and efficacy of Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) and offer recommendations on best practices moving forward, including a call for a local poverty reduction strategy.<sup>12</sup> Based on these recommendations, a local Poverty Reduction Strategy is in development to optimize multi-sectoral coordination and alignment, leverage resources and address gaps.

## **Monitor**

Issues identified by the community as areas of concern. Ongoing data monitoring and trend analysis is required.

### **1 Family Violence (including human trafficking)** Areas of interest: Early intervention programs which reduce intimate partner violence.

### **2 Support for Older Adults** Areas of interest: Services which enable seniors to age safely at home and reduce social isolation.

### **3 Support for Individuals with Disabilities** Areas of interest: Dual diagnosis programs and supportive housing.

# MOVING FORWARD

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Niagara's Plan establishes a framework and coordinated approach to working alongside system partners to enhance safety and well-being for all residents in our community. As we move from planning to implementation, and over the course of the four-year plan, we are committed to maintaining an action focus and will continue to seek input and active participation from community partners. This includes enhanced data collection and coordination to keep a pulse on the evolving needs of communities so that we can stay ahead of the curve and respond to issues in a more proactive manner.

- Action Tables will be formed based on the strategies and key outcomes for each area of focus with partner organizations providing strategic advice and guidance as we move into implementation
- The Community Safety and Well-Being Plan will be reviewed annually by the Advisory Committee
- Staff will develop a progress report highlighting updates, milestones, next steps and new activities that will be published annually

Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan can guide planning and prioritization, evolve and adapt over time to continue to respond to emerging issues, and identify and champion innovative solutions to complex challenges. The planning framework brings together our community in recognizing that we all have a role to play in making Niagara a safe, inclusive and connected community where all residents thrive.

# APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUPS

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- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- A Home for All Taskforce
- Age-Friendly Network of Niagara
- Anti-Human Trafficking Protocol Group
- Business Community
- Centre de santé communautaire staff
- Chief Administrative Officers and Mayors
- Children's Services Sector Network
- Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW)
- Developmental Sector Service Managers
- Housing and Homelessness – Lived Experience Advisory Group
- Human Service & Justice Coordinating Committee (HSJCC)
- Indigenous Engagements (NCNW –lead agency)
- Lived Experience Advisory Network (LEAN)
- Local Immigrant Partnership
- Niagara Children's Planning Council (NCPC)
- Niagara College Student Wellness staff
- Niagara Falls Community Health Centre and Niagara Medical Group Family Health Team staff
- Niagara Francophone Interagency Table
- Niagara Ontario Health Team – Mental Health and Addictions Working Group
- Niagara Poverty Reduction Network (NRPN)
- Niagara Region Mental Health – Client Advisory Committee
- Niagara Suicide Prevention Coalition
- Overdose Prevention and Education Network of Niagara (OPENN)
- Pathstone Family Advisory Committee for Engagement (FACE)
- Police Services Board
- Port-All (Port Colborne Situation Table)
- Positive Living Niagara – Peers
- Quest Community Health Centre – Clients
- West Niagara Forum
- Women's Advisory Committee
- Youth Action Committee (YAC)
- Youth Wellness Hub

## REFERENCES

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- 1 Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, August 2020: [files.ontario.ca/mmah-place-to-grow-office-consolidation-en-2020-08-28.pdf](https://files.ontario.ca/mmah-place-to-grow-office-consolidation-en-2020-08-28.pdf)
- 2 Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population.
- 3 Police-reported Crime Severity Index and crime rate, by CMA, 2019: [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201029/t003a-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201029/t003a-eng.htm)
- 4 Community Safety and Well-being Planning Framework: [mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/Publications/MCSCSSOPanningFramework.html](https://mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/Publications/MCSCSSOPanningFramework.html)
- 5 Phase 1: Identifying Local Priorities Interim Report on Community Consultation: [niagararegion.ca/projects/community-safety-well-being/pdf/interim-report.pdf](https://niagararegion.ca/projects/community-safety-well-being/pdf/interim-report.pdf)[MCSCSSOPanningFramework.html](https://mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/Publications/MCSCSSOPanningFramework.html)
- 6 Indigenous Engagement: [niagararegion.ca/health/equity/indigenous-engagement.aspx](https://niagararegion.ca/health/equity/indigenous-engagement.aspx)
- 7 Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action: [trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)
- 8 Data source: Niagara Emergency Medical Services, 2020. Presented at OPENN February 9, 2021.
- 9 Data provided by Niagara Region Homelessness Services.
- 10 Data source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Presented by Niagara Workforce Planning Board on September 28, 2020.
- 11 Data source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Presented by Niagara Workforce Planning Board on September 28, 2020.
- 12 COM 4-2021: Niagara Prosperity Initiative Review. Public Health and Social Services Committee, Niagara Region.



[niagararegion.ca/projects/community-safety-well-being](https://niagararegion.ca/projects/community-safety-well-being)

