

# Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, 2025-2029: Community Survey Results

## Background

Under the Police Services Act and direction from the Ministry of the Solicitor General, municipalities—including the Niagara Region—must develop and adopt Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) plans in partnership with police services/boards and with sectors such as health and mental health, education, community and social services, and children and youth services. These plans are to be guided by multi-sector leadership, engage residents, and reflect local needs. Legislation also requires that CSWB plans be updated every four years.

Niagara Region Community Services, in partnership with Niagara Regional Police Services created and launched a community survey to engage residents in preparation to refresh Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan. The purpose of the survey was to:

- Understand perceptions of well-being and community safety
- Inform development of priorities to increase community safety and well-being
- Identify current strengths and where change is needed

The survey was voluntary and open for two and a half weeks for the Niagara community to complete. The information gathered was used to inform Niagara's revised CSWB Plan (2025 – 2029).

## Methods

In February 2020, the CSWB community survey was launched with the purpose of informing Niagara's CSWB Plan (2021 – 2025). In January 2025, using the 2020 CSWB survey questions to allow for year-over-year comparison, an updated CSWB community survey was created to measure current local needs and understand perceptions of safety and well-being. To strengthen collaboration, consultations were conducted with key partners such as Niagara Regional Police Services and Niagara Region Public Health, ensuring a unified approach to community safety and well-being.

The CSWB resident survey was launched Wednesday, March 5, 2025, and was open for approximately two and a half weeks before closing on Friday, March 21, 2025. The survey included required responses and optional responses with a variety of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The survey was available in French and other languages (upon request). Perceived community belonging, safety and top issues impacting Niagara were asked to inform local needs, identify areas of opportunity, and prioritize emerging issues. Optional questions included sociodemographic information, like age, gender, and background, were asked to ensure the survey sample was representative of the Niagara population. Participation was voluntary and participants were able to stop the survey at any time. The survey was advertised through all Niagara Region social media platforms and email correspondence was sent to committees and Niagara networks to be shared to inform community of the survey and encourage participation.

Survey respondents were informed, prior to beginning the survey, that their responses would be kept confidential. Survey results are grouped together and identifying information is not included in published reports to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The results will be used to update local priorities and strategies that support a safe and healthy Niagara.

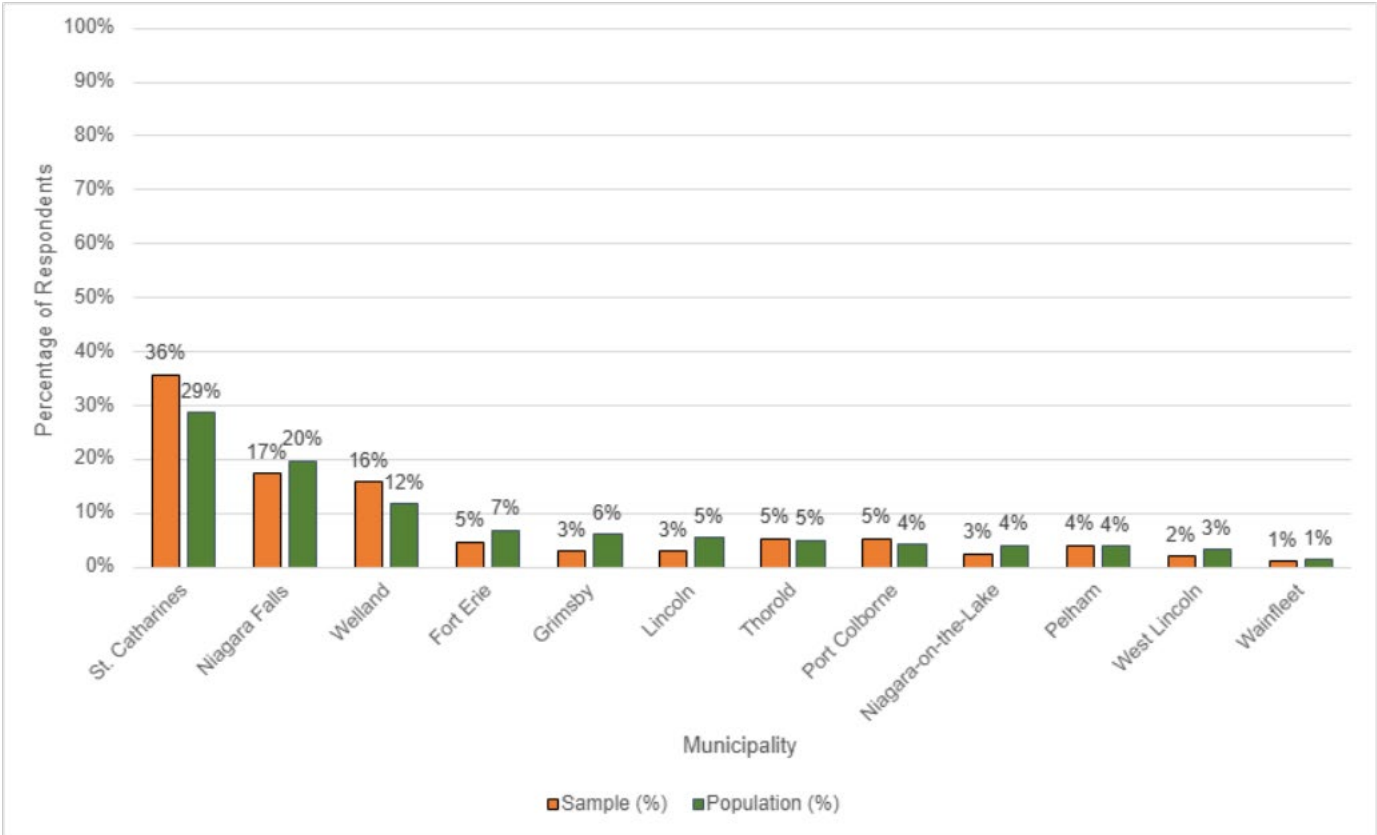
In total, there were 2,102 responses to the CSWB survey; 13 responses were disqualified as they did not meet the age of consent (i.e., 16 years or below). There were 1,523 completed surveys and 566 partially completed. Of the partially complete responses, 85 responses were blank and were removed (n=2,004). Once the blank responses and test responses were removed, 53 responses that had not provided the municipality they resided in, their rating of perceived community belonging, and their rating of perceived safety were removed (n=1,942). There was an increase of approximately 53% in responses compared to the 2020 CSWB survey.

## **Respondent Information**

The overwhelming majority of survey respondents (99%) lived in Niagara and the municipal distribution was similar to the Niagara population as per the 2021 Census (Figure 1 and Table 1). Approximately 71% of respondents participated in the sociodemographic questions; of that total, 71% self-identified as women/girls, 18% men/boys, 2% as gender diverse, 10% either did not see their gender listed, did not know, or preferred not to answer (Table 2). Survey respondents were over the age of 18, and the most represented age group was 35 to 44 year olds (27%) (Table 3). There were 3% of respondents who self-identified as Indigenous: First Nations, Inuit, Metis. Inclusive of those who identified as Indigenous, 8% of respondents self-identified as a being part of a racialized group. Respondents' household income ranged, with the largest proportion of respondents selecting a household income of \$150,000 + (16%) followed by \$50,000 – \$74,999 (13%) and \$75,000 – \$99,999 (13%) (Table 4). There were 21% of respondents who self-identified as a person with a disability, this may be any physical, mental, learning, communication, seeing, hearing disability or illness that may be permanent or temporary, visible or invisible (Table 5). Additionally, 8% of respondents self-identified as being

part of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community (Table 6). The purpose of collecting sociodemographic data is to understand the perspectives represented in the survey responses. Understanding who participated allows for informed decision-making both in the development of the CSWB plan and its associated initiatives, ensuring it accurately reflects the needs of Niagara residents.

**Figure 1. Municipal comparison of the 2025 CSWB survey sample and the 2021 Census population**



**Data Source:** 2021 Census, Statistics Canada, 2023

**Table 1. 2025 CSWB Survey respondent municipality of residence vs. population distribution**

Municipality	2025 CSWB Survey (%)	2021 Census Population (%)
St. Catharines	36%	29%
Niagara Falls	17%	20%
Welland	16%	12%
Fort Erie	5%	7%
Grimsby	3%	6%
Lincoln	3%	5%
Thorold	5%	5%
Port Colborne	5%	4%
Niagara-on-the-Lake	3%	4%
Pelham	4%	4%
West Lincoln	2%	3%
Wainfleet	1%	1%
TOTAL	100%	100%

**Data Source:** 2021 Census, Statistics Canada, 2023.

**Table 2. 2025 CSWB Survey respondent self-identified gender**

Gender Category	2025 CSWB Survey (%)
Woman/girl	71%
Man/boy	18%
Gender Diverse	2%
Do not want to say	7%
Not Listed	1%
Blank	1%
Do not know	<1%
TOTAL	100%

**Table 3. 2025 CSWB Survey respondent age distribution of sample vs. population**

Age Group	2025 CSWB Survey (%)
18 to 24	2%
25 to 34	16%
35 to 44	27%
45 to 54	19%
55 to 64	19%
65 to 74	13%
75 to 84	3%
85 and older	<1%
Blank	1%
TOTAL	100%

**Table 4. 2025 CSWB Survey respondent household income**

Household Income	2025 CSWB Survey (%)
Less than \$20,000	4%
\$20,000 to \$34,999	6%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	8%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	13%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	13%
\$100,000 to \$119,999	10%
\$120,000 to \$149,999	9%
\$150,000 or more	16%
Prefer not to answer	21%
Blank	1%
TOTAL	100%

**Table 5. 2025 CSWB Survey respondent self-identified as a person with a disability**

Do you identify as a person with a disability	2025 CSWB Survey (%)
Yes	21%
No	70%
Prefer not to answer	7%
Do not know	1%
Blank	1%
TOTAL	100%

**Table 6. 2025 CSWB Survey respondent self-identified as a member of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community**

<b>Do you identify as a member of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community</b>	<b>2025 CSWB Survey (%)</b>
Yes	8%
No	82%
Prefer not to answer	7%
Do not know	1%
Blank	1%
TOTAL	100%

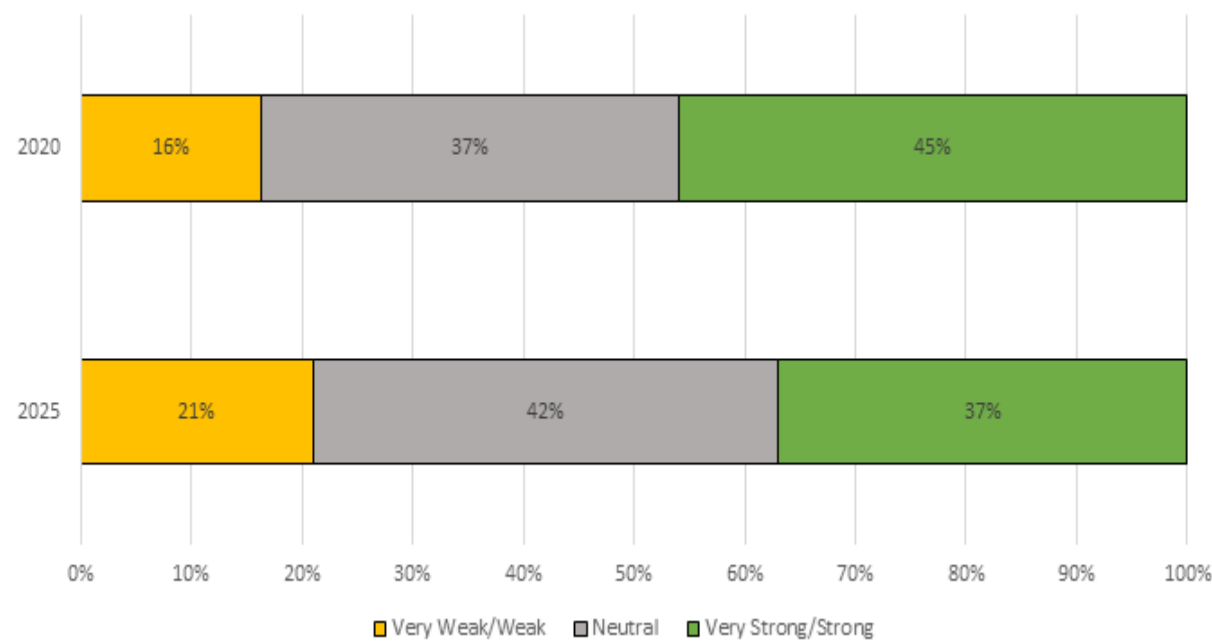
**Key Findings**

When asked to describe their sense of belonging to their local community, the majority of respondents (42%) felt neutral, 37% reported a strong or very strong sense of belonging, and 21% felt weak or very weak (Table 7). Compared to 2020, there was a slight shift with more residents rating their feelings of belonging as neutral or weak/very weak (Figure 2). Those who felt strong or very strong attributed those feelings of belonging to strong social connections in community, with strong relationships with friends, family and neighbours. Additionally, access to amenities and resources such as recreation centres and community events were noted. In contrast, respondents noted lack of social connections and lack of access to amenities and resources as reasons why they felt weak or very weak feelings of belonging. This highlights the importance of access to resources and opportunities to connect in strengthening community belonging in Niagara.

**Table 7. Respondent rating of feelings of belonging in their local community, 2025**

Rating of Belonging	Percentage (%)
Very strong	7%
Strong	30%
Neither weak nor strong	42%
Weak	14%
Very weak	7%
TOTAL	100%

**Figure 2. Respondent rating of feelings of belonging in their local community, 2020 and 2025**





## Feelings of Safety

Regarding feelings of safety, 40% of respondents reported feeling safe or very safe in Niagara (Table 8). These respondents most often attributed their sense of safety to strong connections with friends, family, and neighbours who look out for one another, as well as confidence in their own ability to keep themselves safe. Respondents who felt neutral about safety in Niagara (32%) noted that crime had been increasing in Niagara. Those who responded feeling unsafe or very unsafe in Niagara (28%), also noted increased crime along with visible homelessness and substance use. In 2020, respondents were asked their levels of satisfaction with safety in Niagara and 63% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied.

**Table 8. Respondent rating of feelings of safety in Niagara, 2025**

Rating of Safety	Percentage (%)
Very safe	5%
Safe	35%
Neutral	32%
Unsafe	23%
Very unsafe	5%
TOTAL	100%

## Perceived Crime

Along with feelings of safety, respondents were asked about their perception of crime in their community. Most respondents felt crime had increased in their community over the last 4 years (81%) and 43% thought crime had increased substantially (Table 9). When asked why they felt crime had increased, respondents listed various crime that had been impacting their community, most notably theft and break-ins. Respondents did feel, when comparing crime rates to other communities in Ontario, that Niagara had about the same rates of crime. Hamilton, Burlington and Kitchener/Waterloo were the most noted communities that respondents compared Niagara crime rates to.

**Table 9. Perceived crime in respondent's communities over the last 4 years, 2025**

<b>Over the last four years, do you think crime in your community has...</b>		<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Decreased substantially		1%
Decreased somewhat		2%
Remained the same		16%
Increase somewhat		38%
Increased substantially		43%
TOTAL		100%

**Table 10. Comparison of crime in Niagara to other communities in Ontario, 2020 and 2025**

<b>Compared to other communities do you think Niagara region has...</b>		<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Higher rates of crime		23%
About the rates of crime		41%
Lower rates of crime		18%
Unsure		18%
TOTAL		100%

## Top Issues

Respondents were asked to identify the three most significant issues impacting their ability to be safe and well in Niagara. The top three issues identified were addictions/substance use (62%), affordable housing (48%), and homelessness (Table 11). The top issue responses were similar to the 2020 CSWB resident survey with addictions/substance use and affordable housing being top issues; however, homelessness replaced mental health concerns in the top three issues identified in the 2025 CSWB resident survey. It is important to note that more respondents identified crime prevention, human trafficking and food security as top issues in the 2025 CSWB survey compared to 2020 (Figure 2). This highlights the importance of local priorities regarding safety and access to basic needs.

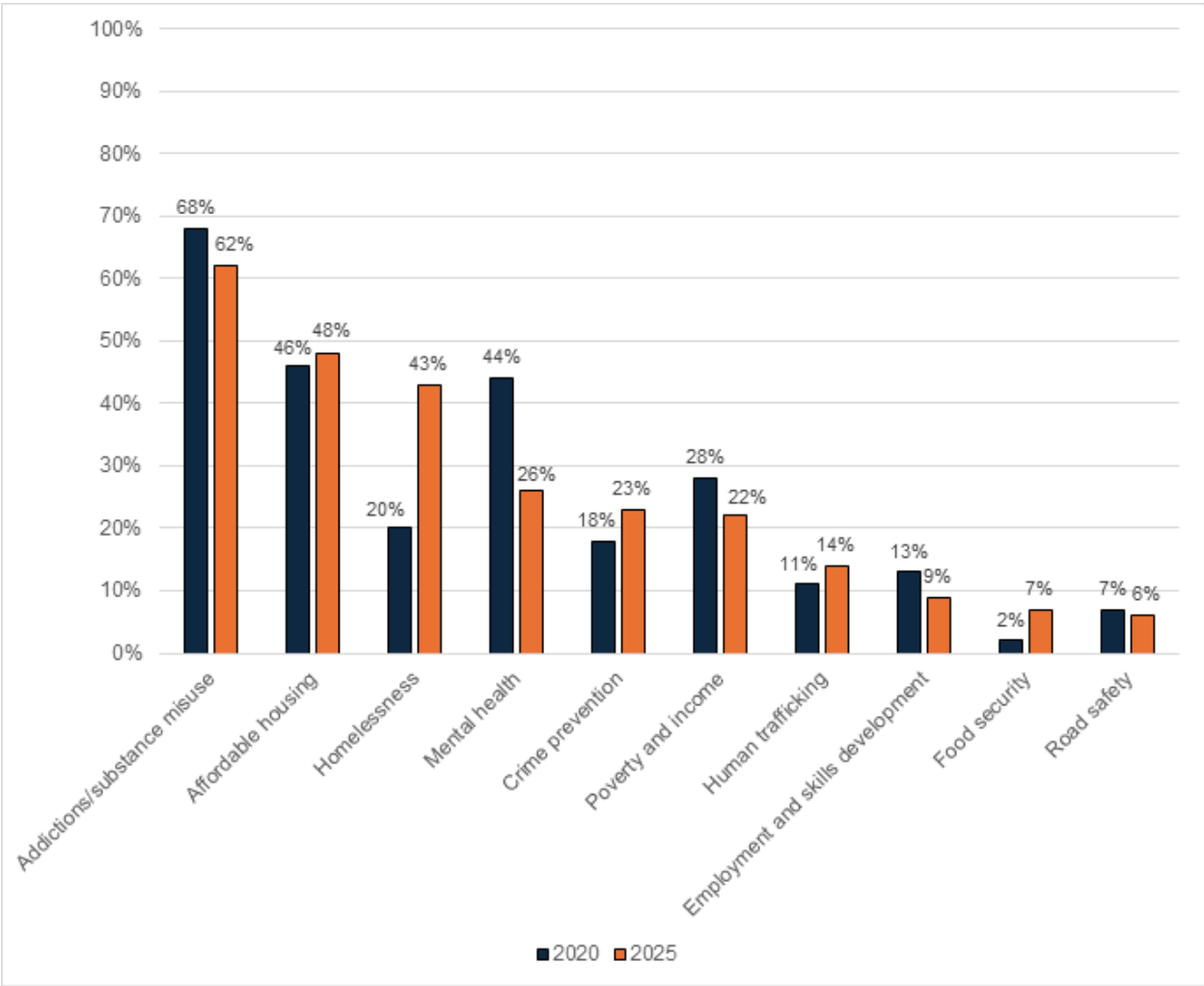
Respondents had the option to share their thoughts on why each issue they selected required more attention. When asked why respondents selected addictions/substance use as a top issue, there were themes of increasing substance use and observations of public substance use, rising crime and homelessness associated with substance use, and lack of supports for people struggling with mental health and addictions. Themes as to why affordable housing was a top issue included costs, mainly high rent and cost of living, and the need for affordable housing to support those with mental health issues and those experiencing homeless. Homelessness was a recurring theme throughout responses and was identified as a top issue. Respondents noted increasing visible homelessness and concern for individuals due to the lack of access to shelter and basic needs. They noted that systemic and economic causes, such as lack of access to resources and affordable housing, are impacting homelessness and need to be addressed.

**Table 11. Top 10 issues impacting Niagara's ability to be safe and well, 2025**

Issue	Percentage (%)
Addictions / substance use	62%
Affordable housing	48%
Homelessness	43%
Mental health concerns	26%
Crime prevention	23%
Poverty and income	22%
Human trafficking	14%
Employment and skills development	9%
Food security	7%
Road safety	6%

Data note: The values will not total to 100% because respondents could select multiple responses.

Figure 2. Top issues impacting Niagara’s ability to be safe and well, 2020 2025



Next Steps

The CSWB resident survey was a key engagement tool to gain insights on perceptions of community belonging, safety, and local priorities. The results from this survey directly informed the Niagara CSWB Plan 2025 – 2029. Additionally, respondents were asked why Niagara is a great place to live to highlight the foundation that the CSWB Plan is building on.

Residents widely recognize Niagara Region as a great place to live, citing access to nature, a strong sense of community, and a broad range of amenities. The natural environment—trails, lakes, and green spaces—consistently emerge as a core strength that enhances quality of life. Many also emphasize the social fabric, noting that supportive relationships and community connectedness contribute to a welcoming atmosphere.

“So many options for exploring nature, hiking, history. It’s beautiful and peaceful.”

“The people in Niagara have a strong sense of community and friendship that makes us feel connected. The landscape and access to hiking trails, paths, and opportunities to explore nature...”

Together, these perspectives indicate that Niagara’s high quality of life is shaped by its natural surroundings, community connections, and access to diverse opportunities.

Moving forward, the Niagara CSWB Plan 2025 – 2029 takes a strengths-based approach and has identified key drivers of success that will be implemented to address the plan’s priority areas. It is important to reflect and acknowledge the amount of time and effort Niagara residents took to complete the survey sharing their opinions and lived experiences. Engagement will continue to ensure the needs of community are being addressed through monitoring of CSWB measures alongside a 2027, pulse check survey. These results will guide planning and action table initiatives, aiming to foster ongoing cross-sector collaboration in addressing the root causes of complex social issues and enhancing the foundation for well-being and safety in Niagara.

## References

Statistics Canada. 2023. Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue number 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released November 15, 2023. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>