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**Niagara  Region**

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**REPORT TO:** Chair and Members of Regional Council

**SUBJECT:** Federation of Canadian Municipalities  
Quality of Life Reporting System

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**RECOMMENDATION**

That this report be received for information.

**PURPOSE**

This report is to serve as an accompaniment to the release made by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) Quality of Life Issues Report on Dynamic Societies and Social Change on February 2, 2005. The national issues of rapidly aging population and growing diversity within the population of Canada which are addressed by the FCM are put into a local context pertinent to the Niagara Region within this report.

**BACKGROUND**

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Quality of Life Issues Report on Dynamic Societies and Social Change builds on findings made in the 2004 Highlights Report.<sup>1</sup> The Highlights Report selected a number of locally relevant indicators from the Quality of Life Reporting System to show progress in six categories representing quality of life between 1991 and 2001. These categories are applied to 20 large Canadian municipalities spanning the nation.

A definition of quality of life has been provided by the FCM which prescribes that quality of life is sustained and improved upon within municipalities that:

1. Develop and maintain a vibrant local economy;
2. Protect and enhance the natural and built environment;
3. Offer opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes and aspirations;
4. Promote a fair and equitable sharing of common resources;
5. Enable residents to meet their basic needs; and
6. Support rich social interactions and the inclusion of all residents in community life.

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<sup>1</sup> Federation of Canadian Municipalities. 2004. *Quality of Life Reporting System. Highlights Report 2004*. Ottawa.

Inherent within this definition is the fact that quality of life within a municipality is influenced by a number of interrelated factors including: affordable, appropriate housing; civic engagement; community and social infrastructure; education; employment; the local economy; the natural environment; personal and community health; personal financial security; and personal safety.<sup>2</sup>

Through the use of this framework, it was found within the Highlights Report that quality of life in the 20 communities was actually at risk, and has been on the decline for a significant portion of the population between 1991 and 2001. While there have been general improvements in areas such as rates of post-secondary education, employment growth and home-ownership, such improvements are offset by a growing income gap, changes to social programs, and an increased strain on the urban environment. Also portrayed within the Highlights Report was a rocky period of economic declination between 1991 and 1996, followed later by recovering levels of income, falling incidences of poverty and reduced housing affordability problems between 1996 and 2001. Not all households, however, shared equally in this recovery.

The most recent FCM report goes into a greater amount of detail on a narrower set of trends which occur during the same ten year period, and the effects on the workforce, community and social infrastructure, civic engagement, and community health and safety in the 20 Quality of Life Reporting System (QOLRS) communities. A particular emphasis is placed upon two of the six factors contributing to quality of life: Opportunities for the attainment of personal goals, hopes and aspirations (Factor 3); and supporting rich social interactions and the inclusion of all residents in community life (Factor 6). Also covered within the report is an in-depth analysis of the underlying demographic changes relating to the aging population, levels of immigration and aboriginal population growth, as well as the implications which these changes have to QOLRS communities and Canadian municipalities in general.

## **REPORT**

### **Where Does FCM fit in the mix of Niagara Initiatives?**

The FCM Quality of Life Reporting system is one of a number of measurement systems employed by the Region to gauge progress on selected community or organizational objectives. Our participation in such measurement systems is in keeping with the Melbourne Principle 10 calling us to, "Enable continual improvement, based on accountability, transparency and good governance." Council recently adopted report CAO 24-2004 which outlined the importance of our measurement systems to the sustainability of our community.

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<sup>2</sup> This definition was developed and endorsed by the QOLRS Technical Team, which includes representatives of FCM and each of the 20 QOLRS municipalities.

The assessment of the quality of life in a community will almost certainly produce discussion among community stakeholders of where we want to be. The Quality of Life indicators will highlight areas of strength and weakness both over time and relative to other jurisdictions. The participation in this study and collection and analysis of these indicators will not, in and of itself, improve the quality of life in Niagara. These indicators will assist in developing targets with respect to priority areas for Niagara. They will permit Council and senior management, in consultation with community stakeholders, to evolve the strategic plan to include specific targets for the community to work towards achieving.

Once the community has set some priorities, and the organization has identified the contributions required of it to assist in achieving the objectives the focus can then turn to the more specific outcomes that need to be pursued within the limited resources of the organization. This is done through our internal processes of strategic planning, service planning, budgeting, and assessments of the services we provide.

### **National Findings on Dynamic Societies and Social Change**

A series of positive trends occurred across the nation as reported by the FCM:

- A general decline in unemployment rates was experienced due to expanding employment opportunities, an aging labour force, and more long term employment opportunities for young individuals and recent immigrants.
- Despite limited levels of new investment into public education, class sizes remained stable, there were modest increases in student-teacher ratios, and illiteracy rates continued to decline.
- Improvements in community health and stress were experienced, including fewer incidences of premature mortality, reduced birth rates for teenagers, and lower rates of suicide.
- Modest improvements were made in closing the gender gap in labour force participation rates and representation in municipal politics.
- Most QOLRS communities experienced significantly decreased crime rates.
- A consistent increase was found in the levels of volunteer hours and charitable donations, suggesting a greater commitment to civic engagement on the part of already established donors.

Not all communities shared equally in these positive trends, and there were a number of negative trends which offset the positive results reported by the FCM:

- In some communities, unemployment and suicide rates were found to be currently high or on the rise.
- University students are facing higher tuition fees and debts in order to meet the education and specialization requirements needed to enter the labour force.
- The need for licensed child care is growing faster than the supply of subsidized and unsubsidized child care spaces.
- There is growing pressure on the existing labour force in the form of demands from aging parents and young children. This results in a greater number of work hours lost due to illness or disability.

- Civic engagement is on the decline, which includes lower levels of participation in voting, volunteering and charitable giving.
- Challenges exist in providing equal economic opportunities to recent immigrants, which could possibly impact their sense of identity with the broader community.
- Substantial barriers to employment continue to exist for the Aboriginal population.
- Although rates of crime on the whole have decreased, some communities experienced large increases in rates of violent and property crimes.

### **What does this Mean for Niagara?**

It must be recognized that many of the services and programs mentioned within the report are not the direct responsibility of the Niagara Regional Government. Labour market policies, post-secondary education, health care and Aboriginal affairs are responsibilities of the provincial or federal governments. Despite this, Canadian municipalities can often be directly responsible for many of the day-to-day services critical for quality of life such as police services, recreation, libraries, public transit, roads, solid waste, water and wastewater. As such, Regional Niagara is forced to play a diverse role in maintaining and enhancing quality of life amidst a series of difficult issues.

### **Demographic Changes**

The Highlights Report indicated that overall population growth in the 20 QOLRS communities was above the national average. This growth, however, is not equally distributed to all communities. While some communities face issues relating to diversity of population, others, including the Niagara region, face the issue of a declining population. Demographic dynamics are an underlying cause to many of the changes in quality of life experienced within the 20 QOLRS communities. Failure to recognize and respond to these demographic changes can result in far reaching problems within a community.

#### *An Aging Population*

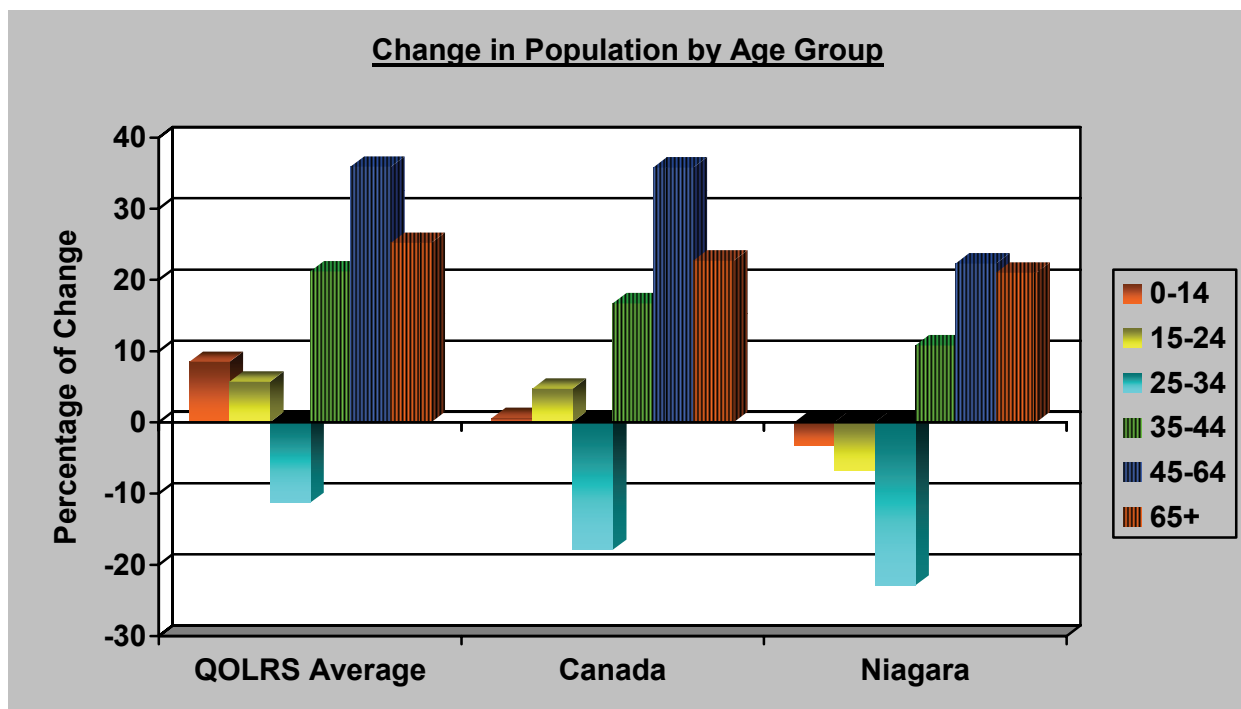
The rapidly aging population of Canada is increasingly becoming a major issue. One now finds that the strongest population growth occurs within the older adult (45-64) and senior (65+) age categories. These two age groups expanded by 25 to 30 per cent in the 20 QOLRS communities. The under-35 population is not growing, and in some cases the young adult group (25-34) is experiencing negative growth.

This trend is far more evident in Niagara than most QOLRS communities (see Chart 1). The negative growth experienced in the younger generations occurs to a greater extent in Niagara, showing no positive growth. Meanwhile, while growth of elder groups is mostly lower than the national or QOLRS average, one finds the 65+ age group to be expanding at the same percentage of growth as the Canadian average. The implications for this trend of population growth are somewhat problematic.

The proportion of citizens reliant on employment as their primary source of income is diminishing in Niagara. The young adult age group is experiencing the steepest decline, while at the same time groups which are unlikely to be seeking employment experience the most growth. As such, there is the potential of there being more jobs than can be filled in the region of Niagara. This could have negative implications such as scaring off business investors or developers in the region.

Also, a unique set of recreational, transportation, housing and health services must exist to accommodate such a population demographic. Aging baby boomers (40 to 59 years of age) are found to be more active than previous generations, and demand a greater array of opportunities in recreation, arts, and heritage.<sup>3</sup>

**Chart 1**



### *Immigration-Led Population Growth*

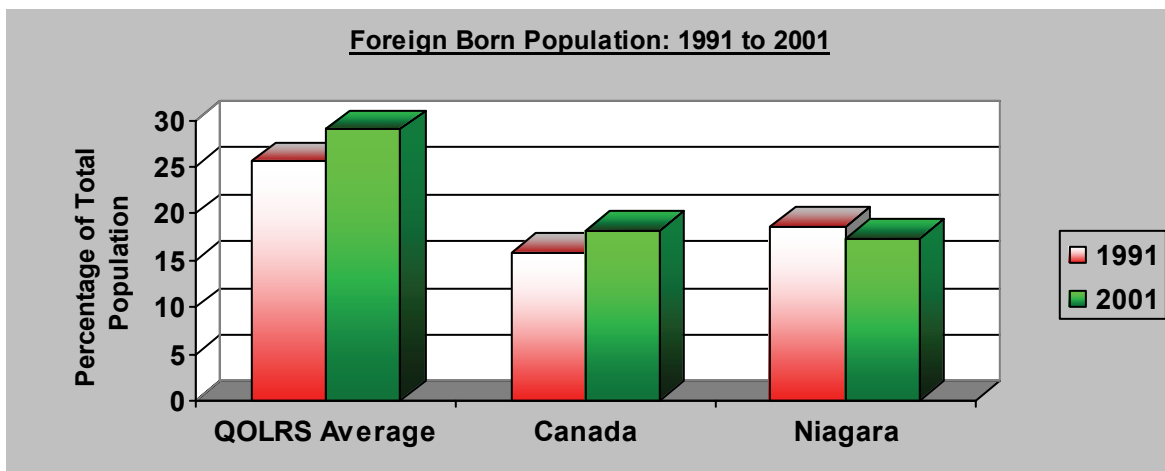
Another significant contributor to population growth is immigration. Over half of the total population growth in the 20 QOLRS communities between 1991 and 2001 was due to an increased influx of foreign born residents. Immigrants accounted for 29 per cent of the population in all QOLRS communities in 2001.

<sup>3</sup> 2003 Survey of Social Infrastructure Issues in QOLRS Municipalities

This trend is non-existent in the Niagara region. Immigration is not being shared equally across municipalities, and such is evident in Niagara (see Chart 2). The QOLRS average population consisting of foreign born citizens is considerably higher than that of the Niagara region. In 1991, Niagara was above the Canadian average for foreign born residents. Since then, however, the percentage of population made up of immigrants in Niagara is declining, and has dropped to below that of the Canadian average.

The implications of this decline of foreign born population immigrating to Niagara are negative in that the region already has to deal with the problem of a declining number of employable individuals living within the community. Often, foreign born residents are trained and skilled upon arrival in Canada. Their talents would be highly welcome within the diminishing workforce in Niagara. Unfortunately, it seems that immigrants are more attracted to major urban centres such as Toronto.<sup>4</sup>

**Chart 2**



## The Changing Workforce

### *Opportunities and Challenges for the Next Generation*

Young adults are clearly more educated than ever before. The current labour force dynamics offer an abundance of opportunities for career advancement for young adults who have just entered the labour force. The ability to attain such success in this labour force is becoming increasingly tied to higher levels of education and specialization. While overall education is very high, university education remains exclusive to a minority of individuals. The proportion of university education amongst individuals varies greatly across municipalities. Communities such as Ottawa and Vancouver had close to 50 per cent of young adults having obtained a university degree by 2001. In Niagara, however, less than 25 per cent of young adults have a university degree.

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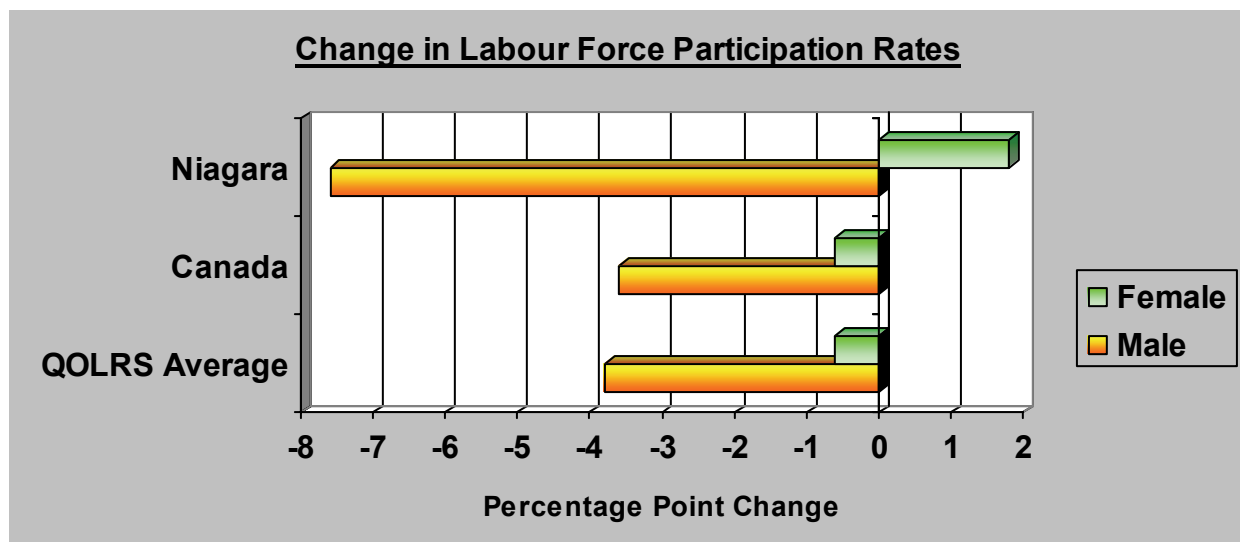
<sup>4</sup> QOLRS data suggest that Toronto's population would have experienced a net decline between 1991 and 2001 without the contribution of immigration.

Part of this problem may be attributed to Ontario having some of the highest tuition costs in Canada. It is difficult to determine the actual effects of higher tuition costs on enrollment; however it does cause the problem of eroding graduates' post-education income. This results in low income for young people and recent immigrants who are required to reinvest in university training.

### *Narrowing the Gender Divide in the Labour Force*

For the most part, participation rates in the labour force across the 20 QOLRS communities are on the decline. Niagara was among the select few communities which saw a rise in the participation rate of women in the labour force (see Chart 3). Niagara had the second highest growth of participation rate for women in the labour force. The trend of increasing participation rates does little to address the issue of a wage gap between men and women, but still suggests a movement towards equal employment opportunities regardless of sex. Also, the labour force participation rates for men in Niagara declined dramatically, at almost twice that of the average rate across Canada.

**Chart 3**



This shift in labour force participation rates within the female population is particularly high amongst women with young children (aged 0-12). In 2001, it is estimated that 74 per cent of women with young children were in the labour force across Canada. Participation rates for women with young children rose in the majority of QOLRS municipalities, with the largest percentage point increase occurring in the Niagara region. The average increase in participation rates across QOLRS municipalities was 2.0 per cent, and the national average increase was 4.2 per cent. The increase in rates for the Niagara region was a staggering 10.5 per cent.

This trend suggests a growing demand for child care in the Niagara region. Early childhood education has a significant impact on the ability of a child to succeed in elementary and secondary school, and has a long-term effect on educational attainment levels. Despite this, problems exist in the child care systems present within QOLRS communities. The 2004 Survey of Social Infrastructure Issues in QOLRS Municipalities outlined a number of negative characteristics inherent in the child care facilities in many Canadian municipalities. A large number of people have been placed on waiting lists due to rising costs and funding shortfalls in face of the growing and changing needs of subsidized and unsubsidized child care. There have been large increases in service delivery costs of child care due to rising operating and insurance costs, while little to no increase has occurred in the amount of subsidy paid. Additionally, changing lifestyles and workplace dynamics have created a demand for child care during non-traditional work times. The current licensed system is ineffective in responding to requests for weekend, part-time, evening, or overnight child care. The slow growth in disposable income, coupled with these issues surrounding child care, leaves few options for mothers in the labour force in need of effective care for their children. To combat this trend, Niagara is actively seeking licensed caregivers, and has initiated an Early Learning and Child Care Plan for 2004-2007.

#### *Economic Marginalization in the Aboriginal Population*

Unemployment rates among the Aboriginal population of Canada are far higher than the rest of the population; there was not a single case amongst the 20 QOLRS communities wherein aboriginal unemployment rates were lower than that of non-aboriginals. That being said, the unemployment gap between aboriginals and non-aboriginals in the Niagara region is significantly lower than that of the QOLRS community average, or of that across Canada. The unemployment rate for aboriginals in Niagara is around 9.8 per cent, whereas the average across Canada falls somewhere around 20.7 per cent. The QOLRS average for aboriginal unemployment is 14.1 per cent. While the unemployment gap was generally lower in communities without a considerable aboriginal population, it is all the same significant that it remained quite low in the Niagara region.

#### **Trends in Community Safety**

Concerns over crime have a strong impact upon the population's perception of personal security, threats to their property, and threats to their overall quality of life. Reported incidences of violent or heinous crime generate large levels of fear and feelings of insecurity, and negatively influence the quality of life within a community.

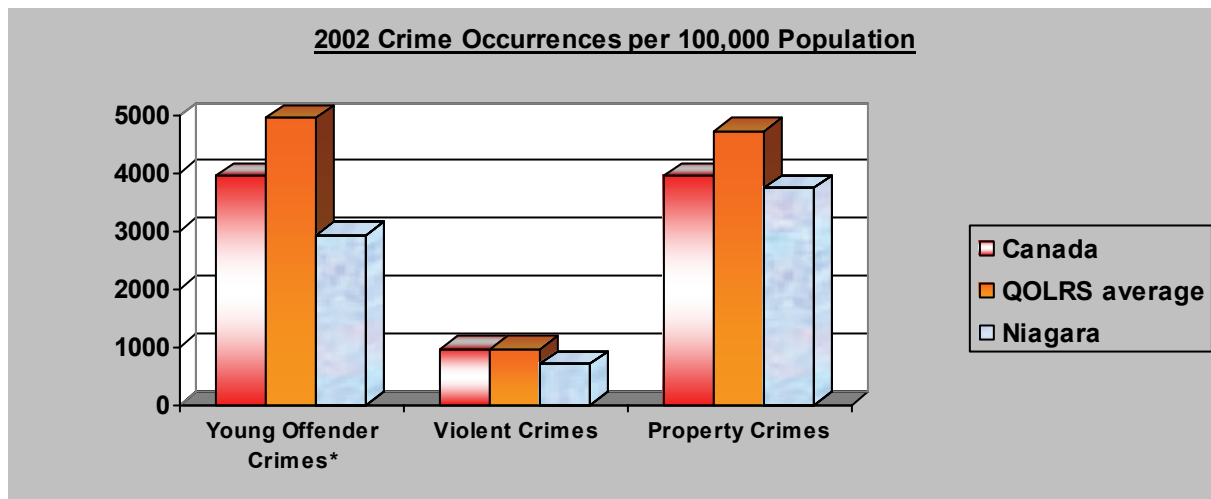
#### *Declining Rates of Crime*

From the 1960s to the early 1990s, crime rates appeared to be consistently rising across the nation. Since 1992, a number of forms of crime have declined in occurrence, including crimes committed by young offenders, violent crimes, and property crimes. On average in QOLRS communities between 1991 and 2001, the rate of crime by young offenders decreased 39 per cent, the rate of property crime decreased 36 per cent, and the rate of violent crime decreased 10 per cent.

In general, the crime rates in the QOLRS communities were consistently higher than the rest of Canada. In fact, QOLRS communities had rates of property and young offender crimes which were higher than the national average, with rates of violent crime comparable to the national average (see Chart 4). The rates of decrease of crime rates in QOLRS communities were not considerably different than national decreases.

The crime rates in the Niagara region have been continually lower than those of both the national average, and the average of QOLRS communities (Chart 4). While the rate of property crimes in 2002 may have been just slightly below the national average, the rate of young offenders was significantly lower than both the national and QOLRS average. The rates of violent crime are also lower, however it should be noted that violent crimes in Niagara were on the rise between 1996 and 2002.

**Chart 4**



\*Young offender crimes are presented in per 100,000 youth population

The feeling of safety within the public which is linked to lower rates of crime has a positive impact on civic engagement within a community. People are more likely to talk to their neighbours, use public facilities, and generally participate in their communities if they feel sheltered from the problems of criminal activity.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Not applicable.

## **CONCLUSION**

This report presents in summary form results of the FCM Quality of Life Reporting System Theme report on Dynamic Societies and Social Change. The report summarizes trends in 20 large Canadian municipalities related to demographic changes, the changing workforce, community and social infrastructure, and trends in community safety.

This report also provides highlights of results specific to Niagara. The FCM report is part of a series produced since 1999. The 2004 reporting is the first time Niagara has participated. FCM plans to release several issue specific reports similar to this report over the next few months. Council can expect further Niagara specific reporting on those issues in conjunction with the release of FCM reports. In addition, the data collected for this reporting system is available to staff and may be used by members of the study for their own needs in addressing quality of life issues specific to our municipality.

Submitted by:

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Mike Trojan  
Chief Administrative Officer

*This report was prepared by Blair Parsons supported with review and input from Kirk Weaver, Corporate Effectiveness Manager, as well as David Klooz, Associate Commissioner of Public Health; Pat Heidebrecht, Director of Children's Services; Patrick Robson, Director of Corporate Strategy; Brian Hutchings, Director of Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities; Tom Hunter, Acting Director of Senior Services; Alan Gummo, Senior Policy Co-Ordination Planner; and Patrick Gedge, Chief Executive Officer of NETCorp.*