Niagara's COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING PLAN

2025-2029

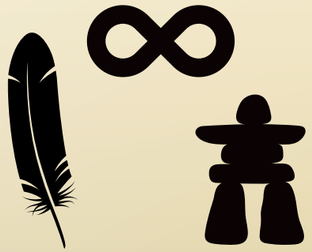


Niagara Region

Territorial Acknowledgement

Niagara Region is situated on treaty land. This land is steeped in the rich history of the First Nations such as the Hatiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis and Inuit from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today. The Regional Municipality of Niagara stands with all Indigenous peoples, past and present, in promoting the wise stewardship of the lands on which we live.

Niagara's Community Safety and Well-being Plan is designed to be a responsive initiative, rooted in the strengths of the community and reflective of its evolving needs and concerns.



As we continue to build relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities in Niagara, we remain committed to fostering meaningful, ongoing relationships that center the safety, well-being, and dignity of all Indigenous peoples. This plan is intended to be a living document—continuously shaped and refined through ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities.

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Message from the Co-Chairs

True community safety and well-being planning is grounded in prevention, connection, and support. It is built on partnership and collaboration, bringing government, service providers and residents together to identify community safety and well-being concerns and respond in creative and purposeful ways. It's about breaking down silos and responding creatively to complex social issues that prioritize dignity and equity. It's about helping people where they are at.

Rather than focusing solely on crisis response or crime, the goal of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan in Niagara is to strengthen the conditions that allow all people to live safe, healthy lives. By addressing issues at their roots, we reduce the need for emergency interventions and build a more inclusive and supportive community.

Building on the insights gained from our initial 2021 plan, Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2025–2029) reflects what we've heard from community partners, individuals with lived and living experience, and the broader community about what matters most to them and how we can better support those who are most vulnerable. Centered around four key priorities—Mental Health and Addiction, Homelessness and Basic Needs, Gender-Based Violence, and Community Safety—this updated plan highlights the importance of both immediate community-based responses and long-term, upstream prevention strategies.

We remain committed to working alongside the community to continually refine and adapt the plan through ongoing dialogue. As our community evolves, so too will the plan—rooted in the unique strengths and experiences that make Niagara vibrant. Thank you to everyone who has shared their voice to shape this work. We look forward to continuing our partnership to support the health and well-being of all who live, work, and play in Niagara.



Ron Tripp,
Chief Administrative Officer,
Niagara Region



Bill Fordy, O.O.M.
Chief of Police
Niagara Regional Police Service

Advisory Committee and Community Partners

Niagara is a vibrant region with many community agencies that provide support to residents. The following sectors actively participate in the Advisory Committee and provide leadership, guidance and expertise for the Community Safety and Well-being Plan and its collective vision for action.

- Child and Youth Services
- Child Welfare
- Community/Social Services
- Education
- Gender-Based Violence
- Health Services
- Housing and Homelessness
- Immigrant and Newcomer Services
- Indigenous Community Services
- Justice Services
- Local Area Municipalities
- Mental Health and Addiction
- Police Service Board
- Police Services

In addition to our Advisory Committee, we would like to acknowledge and thank the more than 75 agencies who have come together to support the continued planning and implementation of Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan and its associated initiatives.



Introduction

The Niagara region is a strong and scenic community. When asked what makes Niagara a great place to live, residents spoke of its beautiful natural surroundings, strong sense of community, and access to a range of services that support a healthy and fulfilling life. These strengths form a solid foundation for advancing our shared vision of community safety and well-being.

Although Niagara has a small-town feeling, we continue to see consistent population growth over the past 20 years. Currently, over 525,000 people call Niagara home, and we are expected to see that number grow to 694,000 by 2051. Niagara is continuously growing and changing[1], and with that comes embracing new strengths and overcoming new challenges – all with a goal of a safe and well community for all.

Originally launched in 2021, the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan is now being updated to reflect the progress made and the lessons learned over the past four years, and our ever-changing world. Informed by ongoing community input and lived experiences, the updated plan focuses on strengthening collaboration across the community to positively influence safety and well-being in Niagara.

> "The people in Niagara have a strong sense of community and friendship that makes us feel connected."
>
> - Community Member, Niagara Region

Local Community Safety and Well-Being Plans are a legislative requirement under the Provincial Community Safety and Policing Act. Plans must be updated by July 1, 2025 and every four years thereafter.

Key Drivers of Impact

Locally, Community Safety and Well-Being Planning focuses on four key areas to create meaningful, long-term change:

Build Strong Partnerships

Work closely with local organizations, businesses, and residents to build strong, supportive relationships that help tackle community challenges together.

Invest in Communities

Prioritize seeking additional resources to invest in community initiatives and programs that directly benefit residents, ensuring that resources are used where they're needed most to improve well-being and safety.

Use Evidence to Guide Decisions

Use local data and feedback to guide us, ensuring that the actions we take are effective and truly reflect the needs of those that live, work and play in Niagara.

Drive Equity System-Wide

Work towards improving systems and policies that impact our community, making sure they are more inclusive, fair, and responsive to the diverse needs of all residents particularly those that have been disproportionately impacted by discrimination.



Planning Framework

In Ontario, Community Safety and Well-Being planning[2] uses a provincial framework that fosters a cohesive, innovative, and multi-sector approach to enhancing community safety and well-being. This strategic framework promotes collaborative planning across four key areas of intervention, each aimed at meeting specific community challenges and needs. By prioritizing upstream and preventative approaches, the goal is to decrease the volume of incident responses.



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.

Incident Response:

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

Community Safety and Well-Being In Niagara

Advisory Committee:

In Niagara, our Community Safety and Well-Being Plan is directed and guided by a group of multi-sectoral community leaders. The Advisory Committee provides strategic direction on Niagara's approach to planning, collaboration, engagement, and action. The purpose of this group is to collaboratively break down silos between sectors to enhance the health, safety and well-being of Niagara residents.

Data Analytics and Decision Support

Community Engagement
- Public
- Community Partners
- Persons with lived and living experience

Evidence-Based Priority Areas

Community Safety and Well-Being Advisory Committee
- Executive leadership with system planning accountabilities
- Issue Identification
- Resources
- Partnership opportunities

Action Tables:

Groups of community leaders, experts in their sector, guide the work of Community Safety and Well-Being in the following focus areas by providing strategic direction and important feedback:

- Alternate Response to 911Calls Involving Mental Health and Addictions
- Data Monitoring and Sharing
- Gender-Based Violence Education
- Niagara's Homelessness Addiction Recovery Treatment (HART) Hub
- Niagara's Situation Table Expansion
- Substance Use Strategy
- Supportive Housing Strategy
- Welcoming Streets Initiative
- Youth Crime Prevention

Key Outcomes

1. Increased coordination and collaboration across sectors.
2. Improved access to services.
3. Greater alignment to key community safety and well-being priorities.
4. Reduced demand on emergency and incident response.
5. Enhanced systems planning.

Community Engagement

Council Strategic Priorities - Equitable Region

Top Issues in Niagara:

According to community, the top issues affecting Niagara residents' ability to be safe and well include:

- Addictions/Substance Use
- Affordable Housing
- Homelessness
- Mental Health Concerns
- Crime Prevention
- Poverty and Income
- Human Trafficking

In developing the plan, careful consideration was given to aligning with Council's Strategic Priorities and other key Regional strategies, to ensure a coordinated approach that is in harmony with critical work already underway in our community.

Some of the strategies include:

- Consolidated Housing Master Plan
- Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Niagara Prosperity Initiative
- Housing and Homelessness Action Plan

Community Safety and Well-Being Survey

Over the month of March 2025, residents from across Niagara's 12 local area municipalities took part in a community-wide survey focused on community safety and well-being. Their feedback, along with ongoing community engagement, helped shape the existing plan to the current four key priorities. The survey was shared publicly through social media, Niagara Region website, and distributed by community partners.

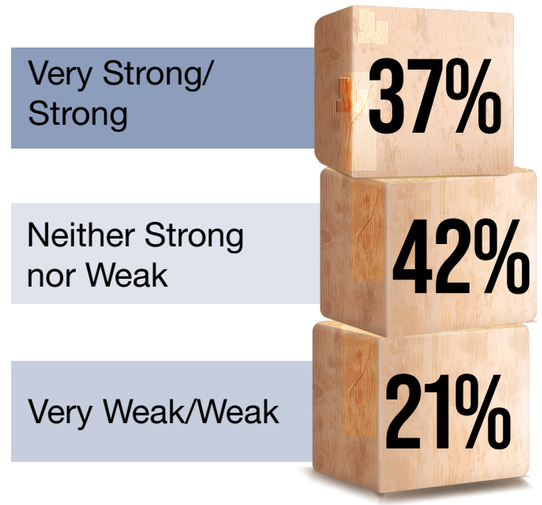
Respondent Information:

- Approximately 2000 individuals consulted
- Approximately 1500 answered socio-demographic questions
- 8% described themselves as being a member of a racialized group
- 71% identified as women or girls
- 21% self-identified as persons with a disability
- 3% self-identified as Indigenous
- 8% self-identified as part of the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community

Respondents Feelings of Belonging to their Local Community

Well-Being and Belonging[4]:

- 37% of respondents reported feeling a strong or very strong sense of community belonging, often citing strong social connections and access to local resources and amenities as key factors
- 21% of respondents reported a weak or very weak sense of belonging, primarily due to a lack of community and social connections, as well as limited resources and amenities



Youth Perspectives:

According to youth surveyed through the Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy[3], the top issues facing youth in Niagara include:

- Substance use remains a critical concern impacting the health and overall well-being of youth in Niagara. Its effects extend beyond the individual, with family substance use also playing a significant role in shaping young people's mental, emotional, and physical health
- Unhealthy relationships, attitudes and behaviours continue to impact our youth - particularly the importance of peer and familiar influences during their developmental years. Strong and positive family connections and sense of community belonging promote healthier outcomes and more resilient youth.
- Poor health and well-being is a top issue facing youth in Niagara - with poverty and poor mental health identified as among the most prevalent concerns among youth.



Indigenous Perspectives:

As highlighted in Mno Bmaadziwin[5], an Indigenous Engagementreport, the top safety and well-being issues facing Niagara include:

- Poor responses from police, healthcare, and figures of authority when seeking help due to unresolved systemic racism
- Gangs, drugs, addiction, violence, domestic violence, human trafficking and homelessness
- Lack of safe spaces to express our identity and access culturally sensitive resources
- Lack of sovereignty and collaboration/ awareness with those in positions of power in order to address Indigenous needs using a realistic approach or culturally sensitive lens

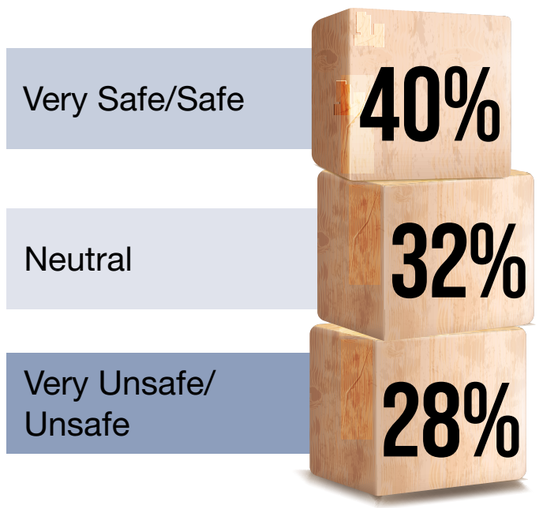


- Poor infrastructure – need more bike lanes, sidewalks, streetlights, bus shelters, public transportation and routes, affordable housing
- Continued engagement with Indigenous communities aims to better understand and support their sense of safety and well-being

Respondents Feeling of Safety in Niagara

Safety and Crime:[6]

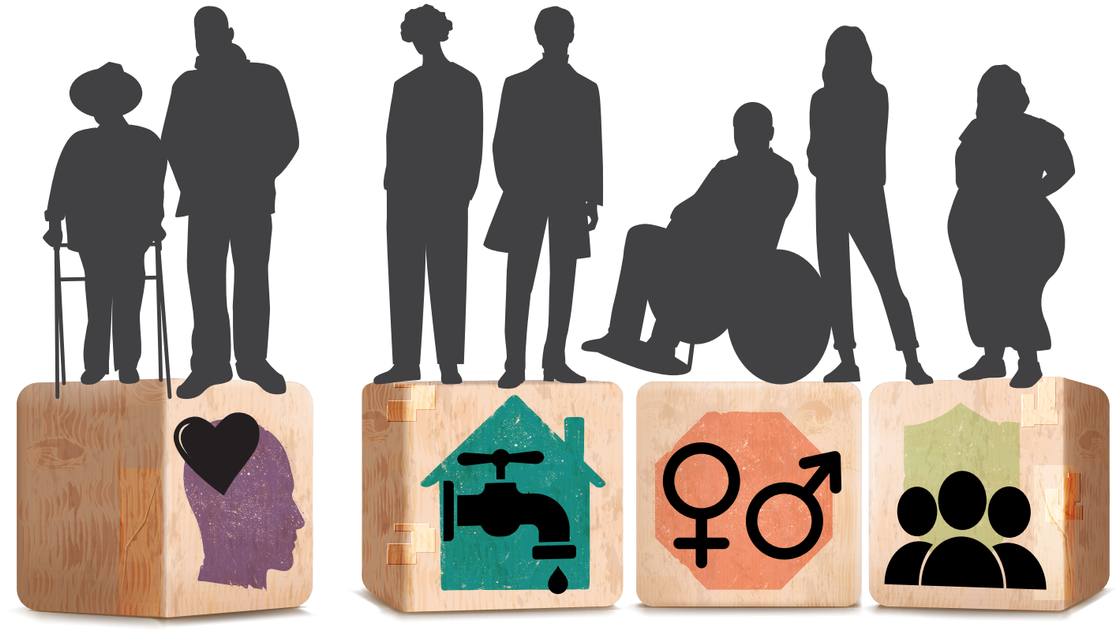
- 40% of respondents reported feeling safe or very safe in their community. This was mostly a result of strong social connections with family, friends, neighbours and their overall community.
- 28% of respondents said they feel unsafe or very unsafe in their community. Common reasons included a perceived rise in crime, more visible homelessness, and increased substance use in their community.



Priority Areas

Building upon our initial Community Safety and Well-being Plan, the Advisory Committee undertook a process of identifying and prioritizing key community issues, using insights derived from community engagement efforts. The following key priority areas have been identified by community and sector leaders as the core focus for Community Safety and Well-being action initiatives. Using an anti-oppressive lens with a goal of dismantling systemic discrimination, the experiences of individuals with lived expertise will continue to influence the actions associated with each priority area.

- **Mental Health and Addictions**
- **Homelessness and Basic Needs**
- **Gender-based Violence**
- **Community Safety**



Mental Health and Addictions

Mental Health and addictions continues to be a priority across the country. During and following the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a growing trend of youth in grades 7-12 who report using alcohol, cannabis and vaping products more frequently[7]. Across the country, there has been a 47% increase in emergency department visits and a 23% rise in the hospitalization rate for mental health, addictions and substance use health in 2024[8]. By connecting individuals to timely and appropriate supports, we can reduce reliance on crisis services and prevent avoidable hospitalizations.

> “Mental health and substance use go hand and hand. More support is needed at a young age. Less wait time, more support, long lasting support.”
>
> - Community Member, Niagara Region

What do we want to achieve?

Improve access to culturally safe, equitable and appropriate mental health and addictions services and support.

How will we measure progress?

- Decrease number of individuals who visited the emergency department for mental health and/or addictions
- Decrease number of local substance use related deaths
- Increase number of historically underrepresented and marginalized individuals with access to treatment

Action Spotlight:

Substance Use Strategy

Creation of a community-led plan that outlines actions to prevent and reduce the harms of alcohol and drug use, support people affected by substance use, and promote health and safety for everyone.

HART Hub

Increase access to mental health care, addiction services, and housing supports for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

Alternative Response to 911 Calls Involving Mental Health/Addiction

Development of a niagara specific model for an alternate response to 911 mental health and addiction calls.

Homelessness and Basic Needs

Homelessness and the inability to meet basic needs present significant health, social, and developmental risks. Without stable housing as a foundation, individuals often face barriers to accessing the supports necessary for safety and well-being. As of April 2025 in Niagara, 655 individuals identify as chronically homeless, including 10% who are youth[9]. By working collaboratively with community partners and prioritizing access to affordable and supportive housing, we can continue making progress in reducing homelessness and improving outcomes for those most at-risk.

Research indicates that for every **$10** invested in supportive housing, it can generate up to **$21.72** in cost savings.[10]

What do we want to achieve?

Improve access to basic needs and appropriate supports for people experiencing barriers.

How will we measure progress?

- Decrease number of chronically homeless individuals
- Increase number of supportive and affordable housing units

Action Spotlight:

Supportive Housing Strategy

Creation of a Supportive Housing Strategy that seeks to understand what supportive housing resources are currently available in Niagara and identify where there are gaps. The strategy will provide recommendations on where attention and investment are required in order to close the gaps and meet the demand of all those in need of supportive services.

> “There is not enough affordable and safe housing in Niagara. This leads vulnerable people being on the street and often in high-risk situations. Being homeless is a barrier to accessing and maintaining connection to many services.”
>
> - Community Member, Niagara Region

Gender-Based Violence

In 2023, Niagara declared intimate partner violence an epidemic, recognizing the urgent need to address the growing rates of violence against women and gender-diverse individuals. In 2023, Niagara Regional Police opened 1149 domestic violence investigations, resulting in 803 charges laid[11]. Since 2020, an average of 59 women have been killed each year in acts of femicide in Ontario. Nationally, 44% of women and girls who have been in an intimate partner relationship have experienced abuse, while 59% of transgender and gender-diverse people experience violent victimization. 95% of all human trafficking victims are women and girls. Alarmingly one in three survivors never disclose their experiences to anyone, often due to fear, stigma or lack of access to support[12]. By equipping frontline staff across all sectors with the skills to recognize the signs of gender-based violence, engage in trauma-informed conversations, and connect individuals with appropriate services, we can strengthen community safety and support survivors in meaningful ways.

What do we want to achieve?

Enhance Niagara's capacity to recognize, prevent, and respond to gender-based violence while providing meaningful support to those affected.

How will we measure progress?

- Increase number of referrals to gender-based violence services and supports
- Increase prevention efforts through community education and outreach
- Decrease number of incidents of intimate partner violence and human trafficking in Niagara

Action Spotlight:

Increase Capacity for Community Agencies to Respond to Gender-based Violence

Partner with community agencies to deliver training, resources, and ongoing support to front line staff, enabling them to recognize and effectively respond to cases of intimate partner violence and human trafficking. This includes supporting people with where the are at with trauma-informed care practices, safety planning, and system navigation.

> "Gender-based violence is an issue that affects everyone. Children who live in an environment where violence is occurring can't focus on learning. Adults surviving in those conditions can't thrive."
>
> - Community Member, Niagara Region

Community Safety

Community safety focuses on creating an environment where people feel secure, supported, and safe. In 2023, Niagara reported a Crime Severity Index score of 54.47, an improvement from 61.03 in 2021. However, the Violent Crime Severity Index increased from 62.83 in 2021 to 66.87 in 2023. By addressing the root causes of harm by connecting people to the right service at the right time[13], we can work together to foster a resilient, inclusive, compassionate and safe Niagara.

What do we want to achieve?

Reduce the need for emergency services by strengthening early intervention and prompt responses by the most appropriate service providers at the right time.

0.89 million

Cost savings federally with strategies that address acutely elevated risk[14].

Public Safety Canada

How will we measure progress?

- Decrease number of low priority calls to 911
- Increase number of individuals overall risk due to connections to appropriate services

Action Spotlight:

Youth Crime Prevention

Through Public Safety Canada's Building Safer Communities Fund, nine local agencies are currently running youth crime-prevention programming that align with Niagara's Youth Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy.

Welcoming Streets Initiative

Welcoming Streets Initiative is a program that proactively engages and collaborates community connections to remove barriers by providing peer-led street outreach to create safer, inclusive communities.

Niagara Situation Tables Expansion

Niagara Situation Tables take a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach that brings together service providers—such as police, health, and social services—to quickly support individuals or families facing acutely elevated risk, where there's a high likelihood of serious harm without urgent action.

What Comes Next?

Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan is a living document, consistently reflecting community priorities, input from individuals with lived and living experience, and local data. The Advisory Committee will continue to monitor priority areas, adjusting actions as needed to ensure responsiveness to community needs.

Community partners will remain integral to this process, collaborating with the Advisory Committee and Action Tables to ensure that identified actions align with the realities and needs of the community. Action tables will continue to lead initiatives within the priority areas, with guidance and collaboration from both the Advisory Committee and community partners.

For more information, or to submit any or feedback, please visit **niagararegion.ca/community-safety/plan.aspx**

Reach out to **cswb@niagararegion.ca**



Endnotes

1 *Community dashboard: Population*. Community Dashboard Category - Niagara Region, Ontario. (2025, April 1). niagararegion.ca/community_dashboard/indicator.aspx?q=14

2 Sec*tion 2 - the community safety and well-being planning framework: Community Safety and well-being planning framework: Booklet 3 - A shared commitment in Ontario.* ontario.ca. (n.d.-b). ontario.ca/document/community-safety-and-well-being-planning-framework-booklet-3-shared-commitment-ontario/section-2-community-safety-and-well-being-planning

3 Data provided by Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Community-Wide Survey

4 Data provided by Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Community-Wide Survey

5 Mno Bmaadziwin. (2021). niagararegion.ca/community-safety/pdf/mno-bmaadziwin.pdf

6 Gun and gang prevention strategy. Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy - Niagara Region, Ontario. (2024, December 4). niagararegion.ca/community-safety/gun-and-gang-prevention-strategy.aspx

7 *Chief medical officer of health 2023 annual report.* ontario.ca. (n.d.-a). ontario.ca/page/chief-medical-officer-health-2023-annual-report

8 Bola, S. (2024, December 10). *State of Mental Health in canada report 2024.* CMHA Peel Dufferin. cmhapeeldufferin.ca/state-of-mental-health-in-canada-report-2024

9 Data provided by Niagara Region Homelessness Services

10 *National at home/chez soi final report.* Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2025, March 7). mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/national-at-home-chez-soi-final-report/

11 Reports & Publications. Niagara Regional Police Service. (n.d.). niagarapolice.ca/en/who-we-are/reportspublications.aspx

12 Canada, W. and G. E. (2025, January 9). *Government of Canada.* Fact sheet: Intimate partner violence - Canada.ca. canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intimate-partner-violence.html#toc3

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14 Canada, P. S. (2022, August 9). Tyler's Troubled Life. publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/2016-r005/index-en.aspx aspx

Niagara Region

For more information

niagararegion.ca/community-safety/plan.aspx



June 2025