

Niagara Priority Profiles



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To improve health and health equity, it is important to understand specific groups in the planning of programs and services. The information in these profiles will help you understand how the different conditions and systems in which people are born, grow, work, and live impact their health. They provide some comparisons of different groups and over time. As populations change, programs can adapt to meet changing needs.

These profiles were created for Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services, but can be used by anyone. You can use these profiles in planning and making decisions in any sector, department, or organization.

Intersectionality is the idea that people have many layers of their identity. Each person has a unique identity. That identity leads to different ways that the systems they live in benefit or harm them. Due to this, some individuals experience more health concerns than others. When you read these profiles, think about these different experiences. When planning projects, think about how you can include people with different voices and perspectives. To learn more about intersectionality, visit: [NCCDH Intersectionality and Health Equity](#)¹.

For further information, please visit:

[Government of Canada Health Inequalities Data Tool](#)²

[Public Health Ontario Health Equity Data Tool](#)³

Please note the date ranges used within these profiles vary based on the data available, and are included in the references. These Profiles were created in 2020 and updated in 2023. The intent is to update with each census cycle. For more information or if you have any concerns, please contact healthequity@niagararegion.ca.

¹ <https://nccdh.ca/resources/entry/public-health-speaks-intersectionality-and-health-equity>

² <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/health-inequalities/data-tool/index>

³ <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/health-equity>

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Niagara Priority Profiles: Homelessness
Version 2

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Note:

If referencing a hardcopy of this Niagara Priority Profile, please confirm that it is the most up to date version by visiting: <https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/equity/priority-profiles.aspx>

The version number can be found at the top of this page on each profile.

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Homelessness: Demographic Information

Data Source Considerations

- The data presented in this profile, while accurate, is not inclusive of all data sources used by Niagara Region
- Two additional databases are used to guide decisions that best serve the needs of Niagara:
 - Niagara's Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HFIS) is a database used by the homeless serving system to collect and manage data on people experiencing homelessness, including demographic information and housing histories
 - Niagara's By-Name List (BNL) is a real-time record of all individuals experiencing homelessness locally, including individual- and system-level data

Intersectionality

- There are many factors that must be taken into consideration when looking at individuals who are homeless in Niagara
- The intersectionality of factors like physical or mental health, a person's sexual identity, gender, race or culture, among others, must be considered to truly understand the situation and person
- It is important to understand these different factors, particularly as Niagara Region continues to work with people in Niagara who are marginalized and experiencing homelessness, so that the services the Region provides are supportive and appropriate

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Point in Time Count 2016, 2018 & 2021

- **Point in Time Count:** a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness counted on that specific day through enumeration and/or by surveys.
- The 2021 Point in Time Count was done on March 23, while the 2018 Point in time Count was done on March 27, and in 2016 it took place in early April (1)
- **Emergency Shelter:** used for a short period of time to provide shelter, to those who are escaping violence or abuse, are homeless, or displaced (2)
- **Transitional Housing:** a transitional period between emergency and permanent housing, which allows the individual to have temporary accommodations (2). This type of housing serves a variety of people such as, families receiving specialized support, people leaving homelessness, and people leaving the correction system (2)
- **Violence Against Women Shelters (VAW shelters):** help women that have experienced domestic violence and/or systemic inequality. The shelters provide women and their dependents services 24/7, which includes: crisis counselling, referrals, safety planning, and providing information on rights (3)

Table 1: Point in Time Count Data: Shelter (2016, 2018 & 2021)

Point in Time Count	2016	2018	2021
Number of people who are homeless	465	625	645
Number of people who are unsheltered	41	38	75
Number of people in an emergency/VAW shelter	210	350	351
Number of people in transitional housing	214	237	239
Shelter occupancy rate	82.0%	117.0%	84.0%
Surveys completed	281	408	439

Data Source: Niagara Point in Time Count (2016, 2018, 2021)

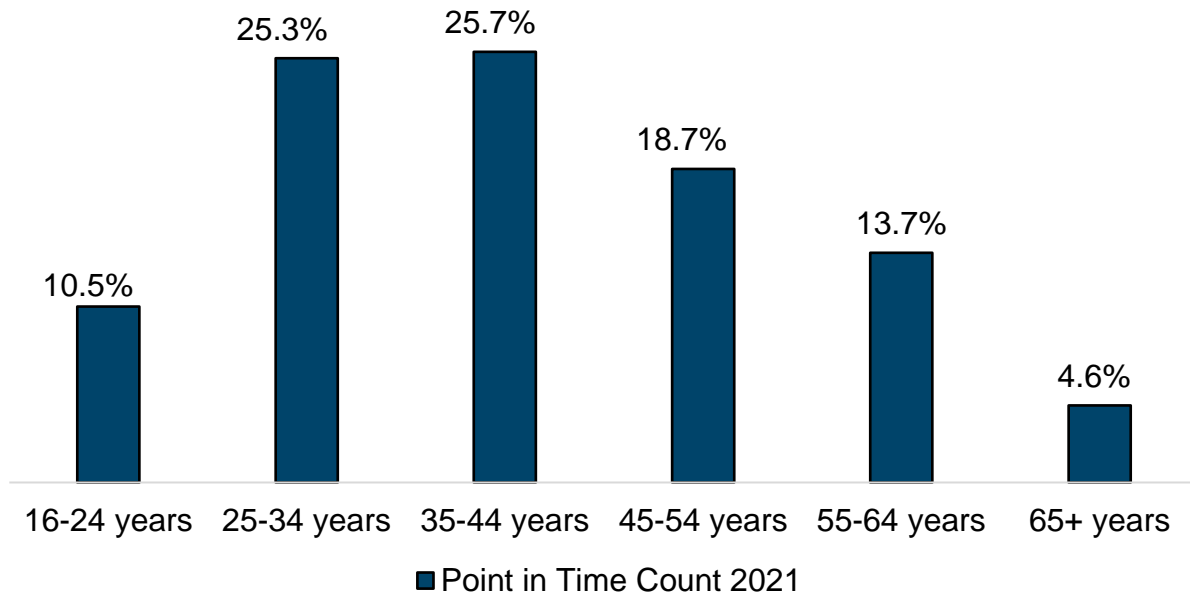
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Point in Time Count: Demographics

- The largest increase in demographic age groups between the 2016 and 2018 Point in Time Counts was age 31-49 at 12.7%. The largest increase in demographic age groups between the 2018 and 2021 Point in Time Counts was age 55-64 at 4.1%.
- The largest decrease in demographic age groups between the 2016 and 2018 Point in Time Counts was age 25-30 years at 5.3%.
- The largest decrease in demographic age groups between the 2018 and 2021 Point in Time Counts was age 16-24 years at 10.6% (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Demographics for Point in Time Count (2021)



Data Source: Niagara Point in Time Count (2021)

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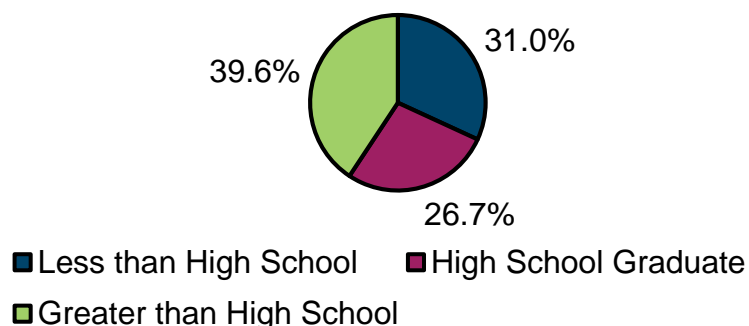
Point in Time Count: Ethnicity and Race

- Almost one quarter (22.6%) of respondents identified as Indigenous. This is vastly disproportionate to the 3.0% (6) of Niagara's overall population who self-report as having Indigenous identity (1)⁴
- Nearly 8.0% of respondents identified as a refugee or a refugee claimant to Canada. A further 6.8% of respondents identified as an immigrant to Canada, in comparison 17.7% of Niagara's population identify as immigrants to Canada (1)

Point in Time Count: Education

- Within the 2021 Point in Time Count, 31.0% of respondents did not have a certificate/diploma/degree whereas, 39.6% of respondents had greater than a high school education (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Point in Time count: level of education (2021)



Data Source: Niagara Point in Time Count (2021)

⁴ Indigenous peoples are likely underrepresented in the Census due to the absence of a number of Indian reserves and settlements in the 2021 Census. They are less likely to participate in Census due to lack of trust of Canadian government, migration between geographical locations, and unclear definitions of different Indigenous Identity Groups within the Census.

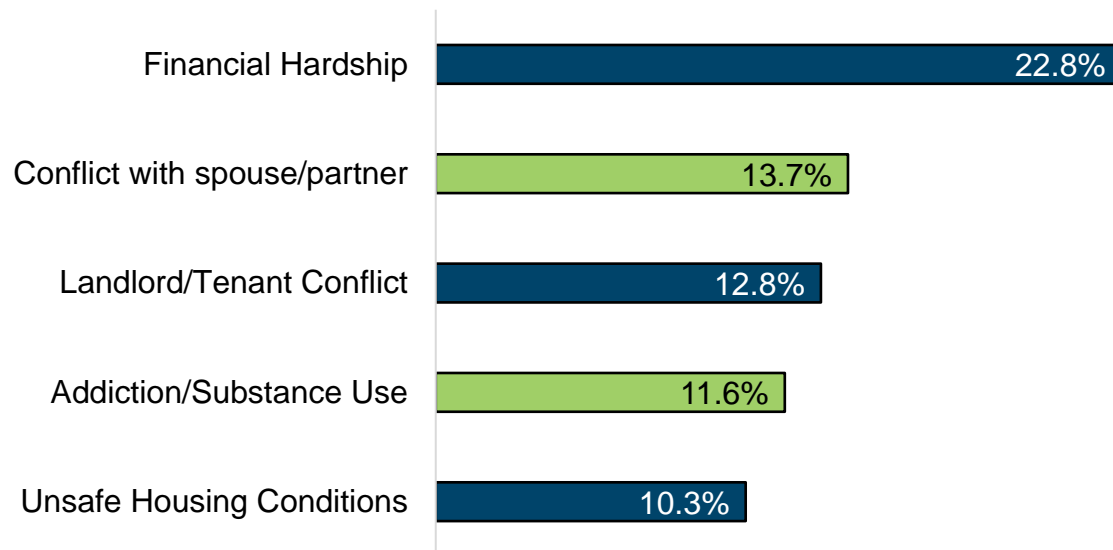
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Point in Time Count: Housing Loss

- The most commonly selected reasons for housing loss were financial hardship (22.8%), and conflict with spouse/partner (13.7%) (Figure 3)

Figure 3: Point in Time Count: Top 5 reasons for Housing Loss (2021)



Data Source: Niagara Point in Time Count (2021)

Point in Time Count: Income

- Approximately 96% of respondents indicated that they had a source of income (1):
 - 71.1% indicated their source of income as welfare, social assistance, and/or disability benefit
 - 9.3% indicated that formal employment was a source of income for them

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- Types of shelter separated by gender are as follows:
 - 56.0% of residents staying in emergency shelters and crisis beds were men
 - 66.7% of the hidden and unsheltered homeless respondents were men
 - 56.3% of residents staying in transitional housing were women

Niagara Region Homelessness Service Report 2017-2021

- Between 2017 and 2021 in Niagara:
 - The number of unique individuals accessing shelter increased by 5.4% (Table 2)
 - The average length of shelter stay per admission increased by 10.3% (Table 2)

Table 2: Homeless Services Metrics (2017-2021)

Initiative	2017	2018	2019	2021
Emergency Shelter				
Number of unique individuals accessing shelter	1,949	2,156	2,141	2,055
Average length of stay (in days per admission)	24.3	25.0	20.9	26.8
Average nightly bed occupancy rate	107.6%	104.5%	107.3%	N/A
Housing with Related Supports				
Number of unique (new) individuals placed in Housing First	85	68	63	N/A
Number of unique (new) individuals placed in Home for Good	N/A	33	9	41

Data Source: Niagara Region Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Report (2021),
Niagara's Housing and Homelessness Action Plan | Community Update

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Homelessness: Social Outcomes

People experiencing homelessness face a higher risk of negative health outcomes when compared to the housed population. The relationships between homelessness and health are complex, varied and bi-directional, and homeless populations are often underrepresented in published literature. It is imperative to use a lens of intersectionality when discussing the health outcomes of this population. People who are experiencing homelessness face varied negative health outcomes stemming from lack of adequate housing, lack of access to health care, higher rates of substance abuse, and lack of access to food, to name a few. Further, treatment and prevention of health issues are often neglected due to competing needs for food and shelter.

Point in Time Count and Health

- Point in Time Count respondents in Niagara self-report as having the following health issues (1):
 - Mental health (61.4%)
 - Substance abuse (40.5%)
 - Illness or medical condition (36.4%)
 - Physical Disability (33.6%)
- Point in Time Count respondents in Niagara self-report as having a need for services related to (1):
 - Mental health (54.3%)
 - Addiction or substance use (29.2%)
 - Ongoing medical services (26.9%)

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Emergency Department (ED) Usage amongst Homeless Populations in Niagara

- A second serial cross-sectional study was conducted examining ED use by people experiencing homelessness in the Niagara region between 2010 and 2018 (4). The number of unique people experiencing homelessness who visited an ED in Niagara ranged from 91 persons in 2010 to 344 in 2017 (5)
 - On average, these patients experiencing homelessness visited an ED in Niagara 1.7 times in 2010 and 2.8 times in 2017
 - The number of unique people experiencing homelessness and the number of their overall visits trended upward throughout the study period
- Over the study period, reasons for patients experiencing homelessness visiting the ED were categorized as more urgent when compared to patients with home addresses (5)
- The total time that a patient experiencing homelessness stays in the ED is greater than patients with home addresses between the study period of 2010-2018 (5)
- Compared to Niagara Falls ED and Welland ED, St. Catharines ED received between 54% and 84% of the unique people experiencing homelessness within the region between 2010 and 2018 (5)
- Overall, within the study frame, those experiencing homelessness had increasing ED use, poorer apparent health, and longer visits compared to those who had home addresses (5)

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References

1. Niagara Region. (2021). Niagara Counts 2021: Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Report. *Homeless Hub*, 1-16. Retrieved from <https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=16848>
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3. Ontario: Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2015). Violence Against Women Emergency Shelter Program Objectives. Retrieved from https://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcscs/open/vaw/vaw_Manual.aspx
4. Hossain, R. et al. (in press) Hard-to-reach Populations and Administrative Health Data: a serial cross-sectional study and application of data to improve interventions for people experiencing homelessness. *Medical Care*.
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6. Statistics Canada, Census Profiles (2021).