

QUALITY OF LIFE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



United Way
Perth-Huron



**Social Research &
Planning Council**

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contributed to this project. We value your contribution.**

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QUALITY OF LIFE

Welcome to Quality of Life in Perth & Huron County 2023. This series of reports provides a holistic look at quality of life in Perth and Huron Counties. We present findings we can celebrate and issues we can work on. We hope these reports will act as catalysts for community discussions and collaborations and help leaders — elected and otherwise — make informed policy and funding decisions.

Background

This is the Social Research & Planning Council's fourth time reporting on the quality of life in our region. Our first two reports, published in 2004 and 2008, focused on Perth County. Our 2014 report expanded to include Huron County.

Since then, our approach to publishing local data has changed. We created a digital platform, myPerthHuron, to provide ongoing access to quality data about our region. We shifted away from printed reports in favour of digital reports.

In the past few years, as Canada coped with COVID-19, we decided it was time for another look at quality of life.

Methodology: How Do You Measure Quality of Life?

Quality of life refers to the general well-being of individuals and society defined in terms of health and happiness, rather than wealth. Purely economic indicators like GDP (Gross Domestic Product) are not sufficient to measure well-being. A broad range of factors play into quality of life. This report looks at the subject from many angles.

Multiple frameworks have been developed to measure quality of life. Our last Quality of Life report used the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) framework. For this report, we wanted a broader scope.

We began by designing our own framework. This framework combined elements from the CIW, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Social Determinants of Health and the Pillars of Sustainable Development.

However, as we began crafting the report we continued to discover other indicators we wanted to include.

In the end, rather than strictly following a framework we allowed the report to develop more organically based on the information available to us in consultation with our volunteers and community partners.

As the report progressed, and the number of indicators increased, we decided the amount of information was too vast to contain within a single report. As such, Quality of Life in Perth & Huron County 2023 became a series of five reports: Who We Are, A Diverse Community, A Strong Economy, A Healthy Well-Being, and A Clean Environment. Each report is accompanied by a data summary.

Recommendations

Throughout the process of creating this report, we collaborated closely with diverse community partners to develop recommendations based on our findings. We provide recommendations for different levels of government, for community organizations and businesses and sometimes for individuals.

Sources and Limitations

The data in this report is drawn from a wide variety of local, provincial and national sources. These sources vary in their scope and applicability. Some accurately reflect the whole population. Others may only reflect part of the population. And it is always possible that errors or omissions have been made. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic seriously disrupted all types of organizations, often affecting their ability to collect consistent data. With this in mind, we should exercise caution as we interpret and analyze this data and we should hesitate to draw firm conclusions.



Who We Are

Located in Southwestern Ontario, Perth and Huron Counties are rich agricultural regions with more than 4,850 farms and around 811,637 farm area-acres, two-thirds of which are in Huron County. The City of Stratford and the Town of St. Mary's are the most significant population centres in Perth and have their own municipal governments. Goderich is Huron County's largest community.



Municipalities



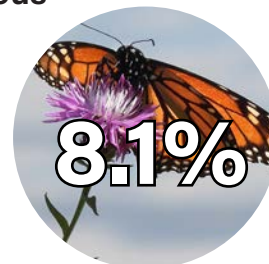
People identify as Indigenous



Farms



Households



of the Population are Immigrants

Size and Population Growth

According to the last three censuses, Canada is maintaining a consistent rate of growth. Overall, the population changed by 5.2%, however, Ontario has a more rapid increase of 5.8%.

Canada			Ontario		
Census	Population	Population Change	Census	Population	Population Change
2011	33,476,688		2011	12,851,821	
2016	35,151,728	5%	2016	13,448,495	4.60%
2021	36,991,981	5.20%	2021	14,223,942	5.80%

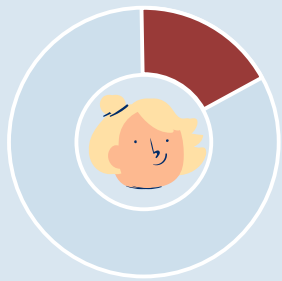
Table 1: Population Change, Canada-Ontario

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021, 2016, and 2021. Population and dwellings section.

PERTH
81,565
HURON
61,366
143,130

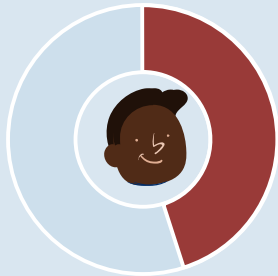
grew by
5% (6,822)
in five years

The Median Age in Perth and Huron is Higher Than the Province



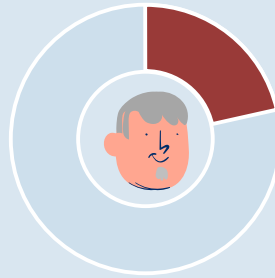
17%

0-14 Years



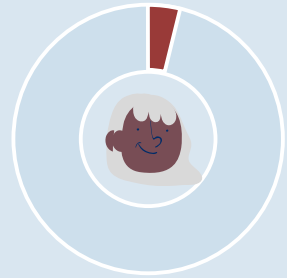
59%

15-64 years



21%

65-84 years

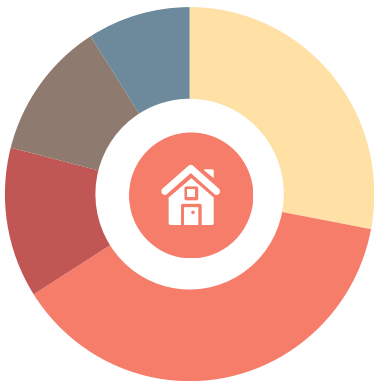


3%

85 years+

Families and Households

PERTH Private Households



28%

1 person

12%

4 person

38%

2 person

9%

5 or more
persons

13%

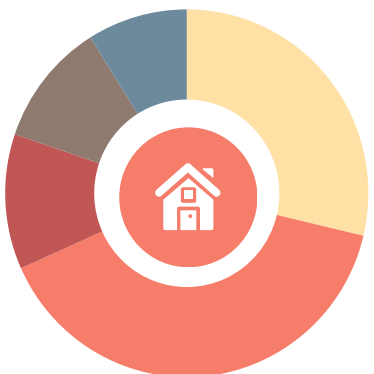
3 person

#

32,770

Total private
households

HURON Private Households



29%

1 person

11%

4 person

40%

2 person

9%

5 or more
persons

12%

3 person

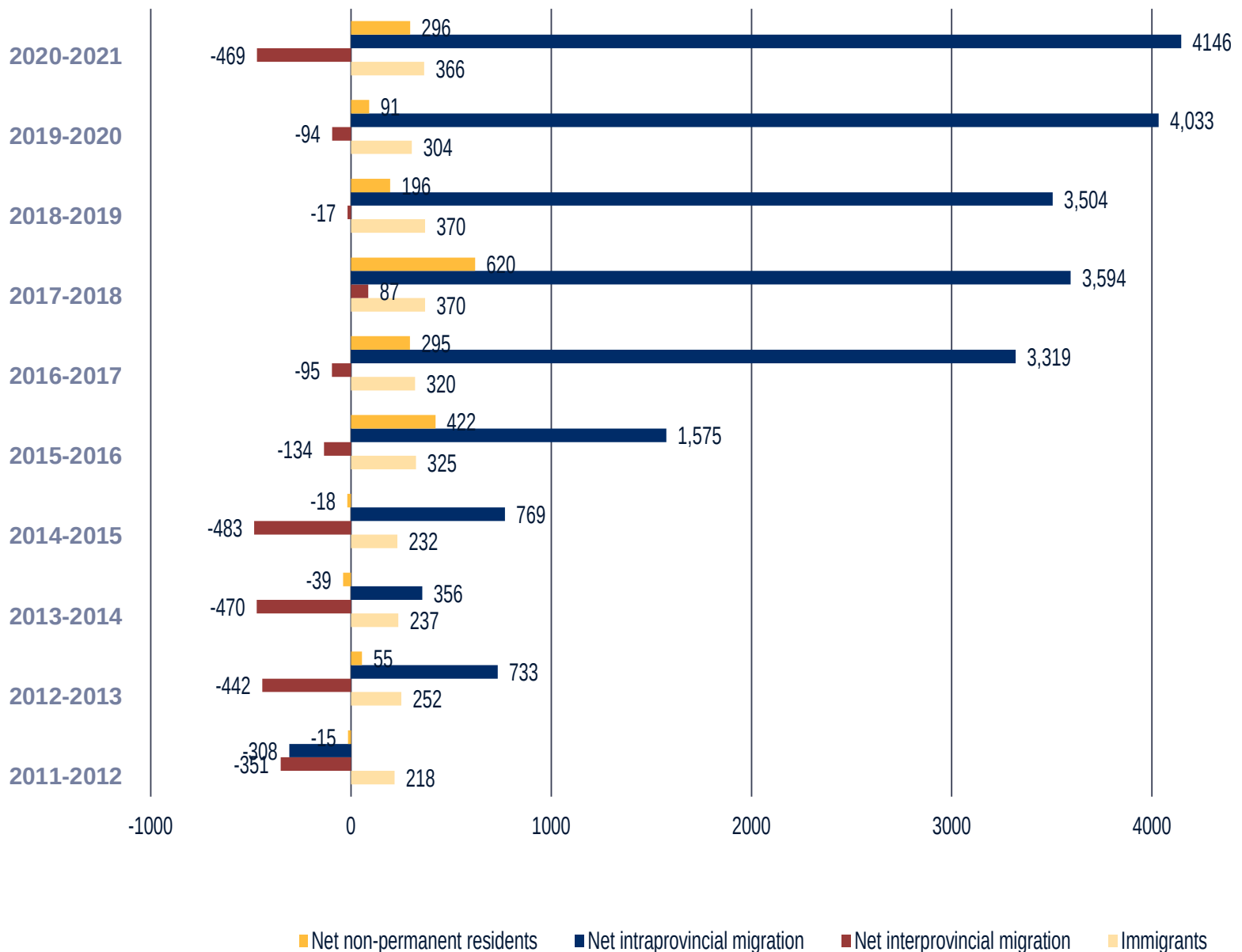
#

25,335

Total private
households

Ontarians Relocating is a Main Contributor to Population Growth

The main factor contributing to population growth in our economic region, the Stratford-Bruce Peninsula is net intraprovincial migration — individuals moving from elsewhere in Ontario — with rates increasing significantly over the last five years. In the last year's period (2020 to 2021) the net interprovincial loss — individuals moving out of province — of 469 people was the most significant loss over the last five years.

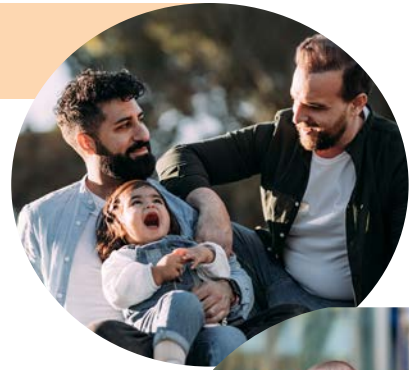


Graph: Population Mobility

Source: Statistics Canada, Annual Demographic Estimates: Sub-provincial Areas. Population estimates and growth.

A Diverse Community

A community can be diverse in many ways. It might be home to people from a range of ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. Community members may have different lifestyles, interests, values and experiences. Encouraging and maintaining a diverse community involves appreciating and respecting the ways people can be different from one another. “ When we reflect diversity, such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, culture, and (dis)ability in our communities and structures, we’re more likely to have more engagement and better outcomes for all. Although there is plenty of variation among residents of Perth and Huron, our region is less diverse than other parts of our province, something we share with other rural regions.



Indigenous Population in Perth-Huron is Small, But Significant

Indigenous refers to people who identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. First Nations refers to a broad range of Indigenous communities who are distinct from the Métis and Inuit. Métis refers to communities or individuals of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry. Inuit refers to an Indigenous people historically located in the Arctic. The Indigenous population in Perth-Huron is slightly smaller proportionally than across the province, but it is not insignificant. Over 2,300 individuals in the Perth-Huron region identify as Indigenous.

2,300

individuals in Perth-Huron identify as Indigenous.

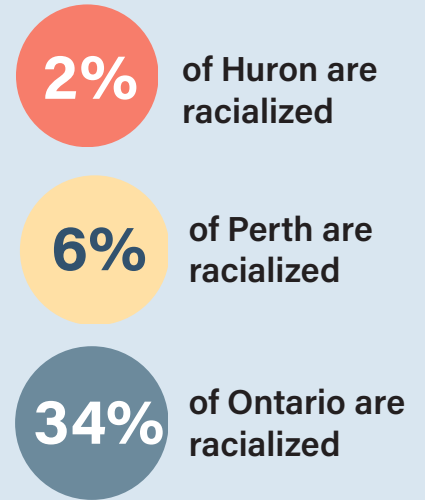


Truth and Reconciliation
Commission of Canada

Established in 2008, the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** formally documented the history and impacts of Canada’s residential school system which operated between 1831 and 1996. It is estimated 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children were forcibly separated from their families and made to attend residential schools. Thousands died at the schools or because of the horrendous abuse they experienced in the system and thousands remain missing. The Commission released its final report along with 94 Calls to Action in 2015 after years of gathering testimonies from survivors and witnesses.

Racialized Population is Small for Province, Like Other Rural Areas

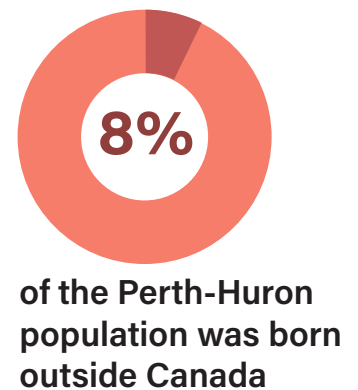
According to Statistics Canada, 5.5% of the population in Perth and 2% of the population in Huron are racialized populations. While this is much smaller than the provincial ratio of 34.3%, these numbers are consistent with other rural regions. Compared to some other rural areas, Perth and Huron have a slightly larger population of racialized groups. The largest racialized population in Perth is South Asian, while in Huron the largest population is Black.



We Have a Proportionally High Number of Young Immigrants

According to the 2021 census, Huron is home to 4,200 immigrants and Perth has 7,310 immigrants. In other words, 7% of the population in Huron and 9.1% of the population in Perth were born outside Canada. While these numbers are lower than the province overall, they are consistent with other rural areas in Ontario.

Across Perth, Huron and the rest of Ontario, most immigrants were between the ages of 25 and 44 when they arrived in Canada. However, Perth and Huron have seen significantly more young immigrants proportionally than Ontario as a whole.



24% of Ontarians Identify as Having a Disability

Every five years, Statistics Canada conducts the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD). According to the most recent one from 2017, 24.1% of people in Ontario identify as persons with a disability either visible or not visible. 14.7% of people aged 15 to 44, 31.2% aged 45 to 74 and 53.5% aged 75 and over identify as persons with a disability. Data for the next CSD is currently being collected.

There is a Significant Gap in Data on the LGBTQ2S+ Community

There is a lot of missing data when it comes to the LGBTQ2S+ population in Perth and Huron, including limited data available from Statistics Canada through the last census. Out of 11,782,845 people in Ontario, around 24,000 people identify as transgender and roughly 15,000 as non-binary persons. However, Statistics Canada data for our region does not reference transgender or non-binary identities. Instead, data is broken down by men+ (which includes men, boys and some non-binary persons) and women+ (which includes women, girls and some non-binary persons). Similar patterns are seen for data on sexual orientation. While it is collected, it cannot always be reported. Data must be aggregated this way because of small population sizes and to protect the confidentiality of respondents. But it also prevents us from understanding our community.



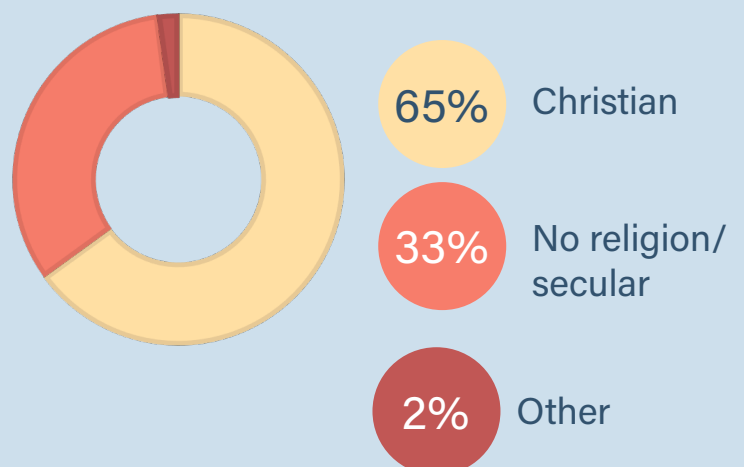
Language Family	Region of Origin	Language
Tai-Kadai	Southern China, Northeast India, Southeast Asia	Lao, Thai
Sino-Tibetan	China, India, Myanmar, Nepal	Mandarin, Cantonese
Italic (Romance)	Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania	Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish
Indo-Iranian	India, Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, some areas of the Caucasus Mountains	Gujarati, Hindi, Nepali, Punjabi, Urdu, Persian
Dravidian	Southern India, Northeast Sri Lanka, Southwest Pakistan	Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu
Austronesian	Philippines, Indonesia, Madagascar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Taiwan	Ilocano, Pangasinan, Tagalog
Afro-Asiatic	North Africa, Southwest Asia	Amharic, Arabic, Tigrigna
Indo-European	Europe, Asia, Northern India	Balto-Slavic, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Ukrainian, Germanic (German, Pennsylvania German), Dutch, Low German, Plaudietsch, Greek

Religious Diversity

According to Statistics Canada, 65% of the population in Perth-Huron identifies as Christian, 33% practice no religion and/or holds a secular perspective (atheism, agnosticism and humanism, for instance), and 2% practice various other religions (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Traditional (North American Indigenous Spirituality)).

Graph: Religious Identity

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021.



	Recommendation	Individual / Community	Organizations Businesses	Municipal Gov.	Provincial /Federal Gov.
1	Learn about Canada's colonial roots and take responsibility for meeting the Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.				
2	Engage with the local Indigenous community to identify and establish self-determined resources, such as Friendship Centres in Perth-Huron, that will among other things, provide opportunities for collaboration and learning.				
3	The federal government, through IRCC, provides funding to establish an Immigration Partnership to better support newcomers and newcomer-serving organizations in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County.				
4	Provincial and federal governments fund programs and services such as settlement, employment, language learning, etc., for temporary residents.				
5	Municipal government, community members, organizations and business engage with Immigration Partnerships and other programs to support newcomers, regardless of immigration status, to create welcoming communities.				
6	Local agencies and governments collaborate to ensure the availability of quality data on those living with disabilities.				
7	Local agencies and government collect data in a manner that complies with the Ontario government's <i>Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racis</i> .				
8	Local agencies and governments ensure that gender diverse options for self-identification are available in surveys and other data collection tools.				



A Healthy Well-Being

This report also describes factors contributing to individual health. There are societal conditions that keep people healthy which will be described in Economic Quality of Life in more detail, such as adequate income, meaningful work, decent housing and healthy food. Shifting these conditions requires collective action across society to create equitable communities and policies enabling everyone to enjoy health and well-being.

Many Youth Struggle with Mental Health, Worse in Pandemic

Among youth, 30% reported feeling depressed most days in the last week and 38% felt nervous, anxious or on edge most days in the last two weeks. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, 51% reported their anxiety increased and 54% reported their loneliness increased. According to the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 42% of students in Ontario report they wanted to speak with someone about a mental health problem in the past year but did not know who to go to.

Youth Use Screens More Than Recommended

According to the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines, youth aged five to 13 should have nine to 11 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night and those aged 14 to 17 should have eight to 10 hours. Among youth, 59% are meeting these guidelines.

Vaping Has Increased in Youth

In Perth-Huron, 10% of youth are smokers and 31% have not smoked but are susceptible to begin in the future. Meanwhile, underage drinking increases the risk of heavy alcohol consumption in adulthood. Among local youth, 24% reported binge drinking in the past month. Smoking and alcohol consumption were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as 21% reported their alcohol intake increased and 14% reported their vaping use increased. In the case of vaping, 26% of youth indicated they vaped in the last 30 days.

Efforts to improve overall youth health and well-being and reduce social and health inequities can go a long way toward minimizing the risk of substance-related harms. These include healthy relationships, community connections, access to high-quality education and a safe community and school environment.



24%

of Ontario students are depressed about the future because of climate change



50%

of Ontario students report being worried about climate change

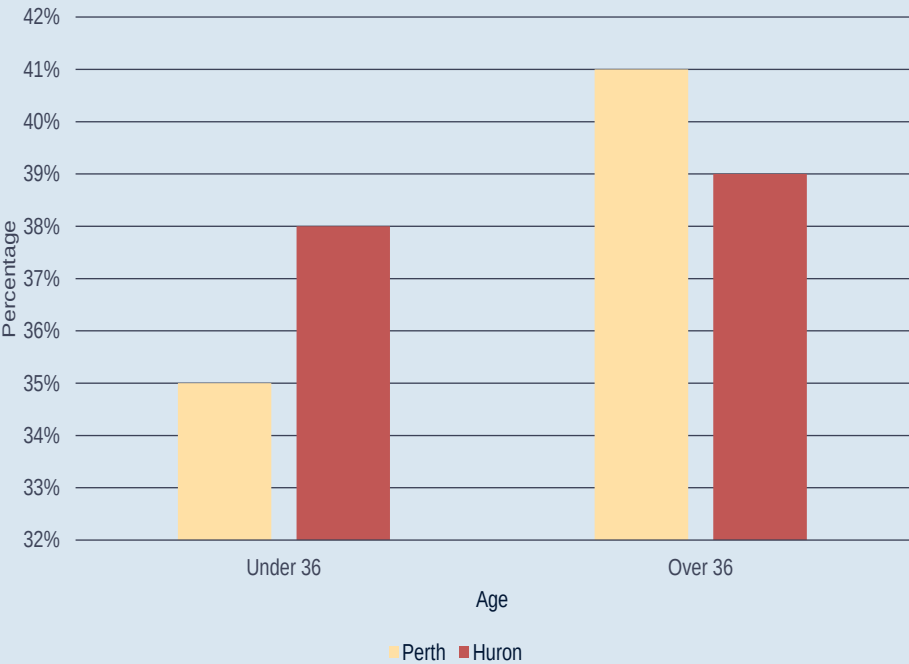


94%

of youth spend more than two hours a day on recreational screen time

*The OSDUHS reports on Ontario numbers. These statistics are not specific to the Perth-Huron region

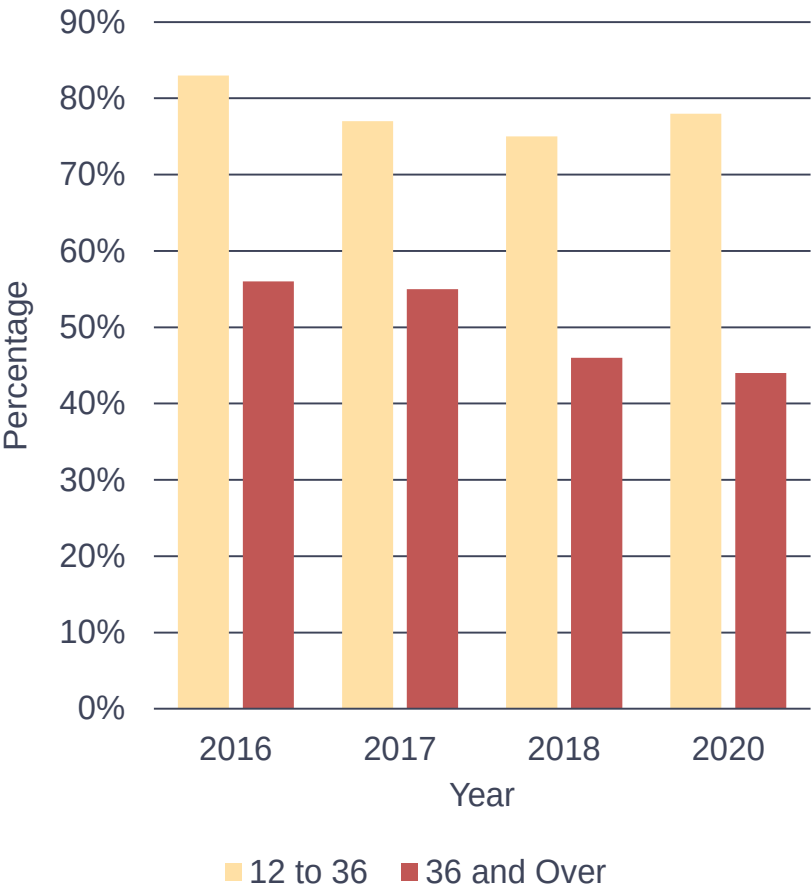
Perth-Huron Less Stressed Than Province



Reported Life Stress
Source: Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population.

Activity Levels Decrease With Age, Down Overall

According to the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines, adults need to be engaged in at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity per week to be considered physically active. Muscle-strengthening activities should be done at least twice a week using major muscle groups.



Physical Activity Levels
Source: Environics Analytics. Community Life 2021.

Incidence of Chronic Diseases

Chronic diseases are non-communicable (not passed from person-to-person), typically last for longer than one year, develop slowly over time, require ongoing medical treatment and may limit a person's ability to perform daily activities. Chronic diseases result from several factors — some known and some unknown, some modifiable and some non-modifiable — such as age. Tobacco use, physical inactivity, harmful use of alcohol and poor nutrition are risk factors for chronic diseases. Poor nutrition can be a result of food insecurity — the lack of access to nutritious foods — and impact a person's ability to follow healthy eating guidelines. Smoking any substance is a major cause of chronic disease. Meanwhile, alcohol is the leading preventable cause of death, disability and social problems. This includes certain cancers, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, unintentional injuries and violence.



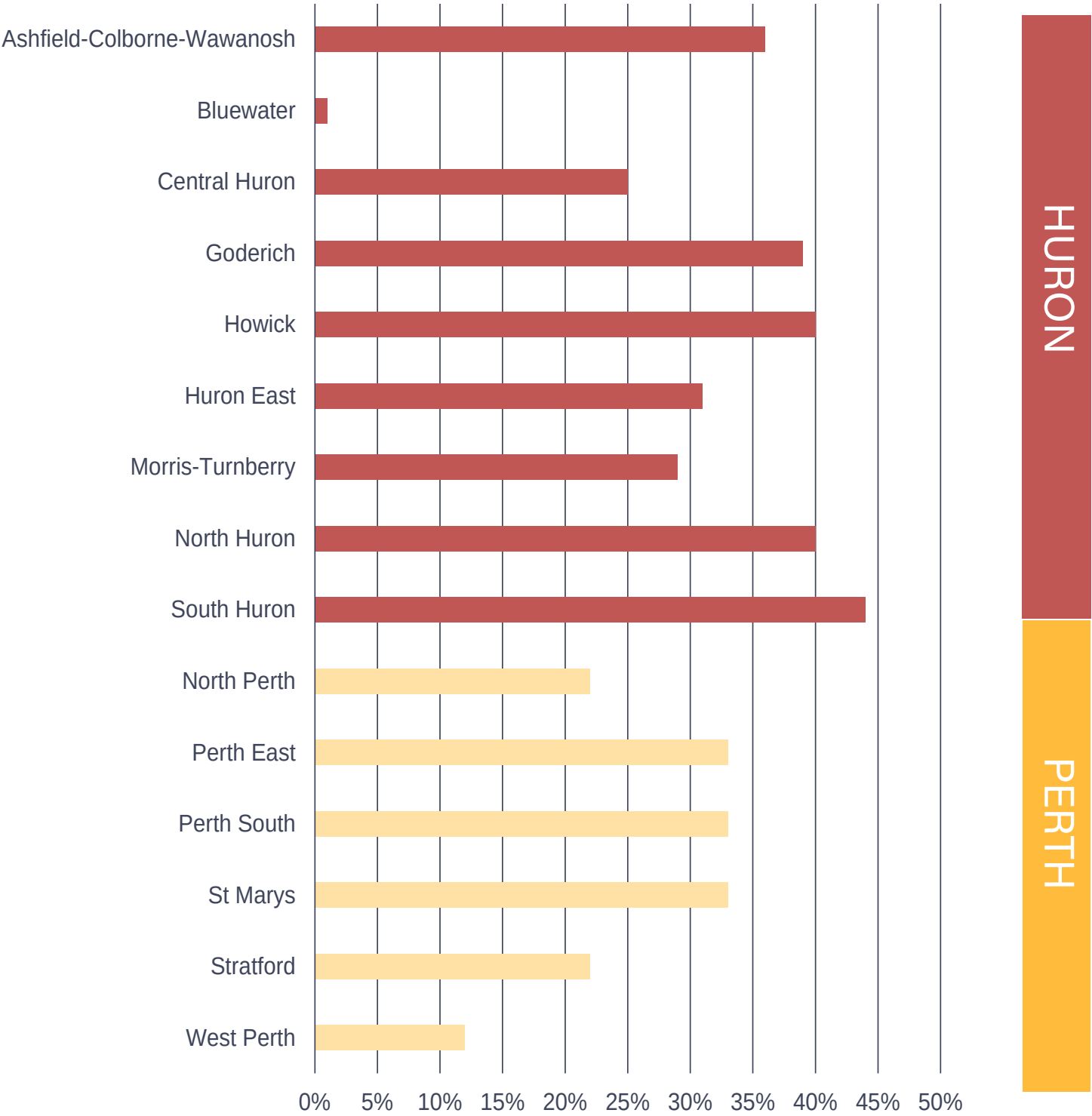
Poor nutrition can be a result of food insecurity — the lack of access to nutritious foods — and impact a person's ability to follow healthy eating guidelines.



Perth-Huron Has Fewer Residents With Bachelor's Degrees or Higher, But Higher Than Province for Apprenticeship, College or CEGEP Certificates or Diplomas

Education level is a significant predictor of quality of life. Investments in education bring social returns to individuals and society and reduce income inequality. More highly educated people are healthier, more active socially and better paid. Knowledge spillovers from education generate social benefits such as reduction in crime, improved health outcomes and intergenerational effects. Level of education also predicts democratic participation and education for future generations.

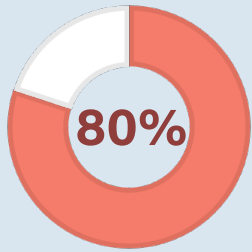
Most Municipal Candidates Are Male, Huron Saw More Female Candidates Than Perth



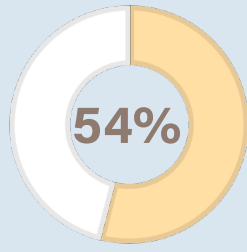
Graph 9: Female Candidates in Huron & Perth 2022 Municipal Elections
Source: AMO

Safety

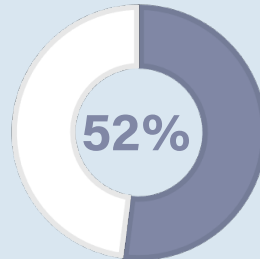
Living in safe communities is essential for well-being and personal security is a large component. If people feel safe walking in the dark in their neighbourhoods and communities, this reflects personal safety.



of people in **Huron**
feel safe walking
after dark

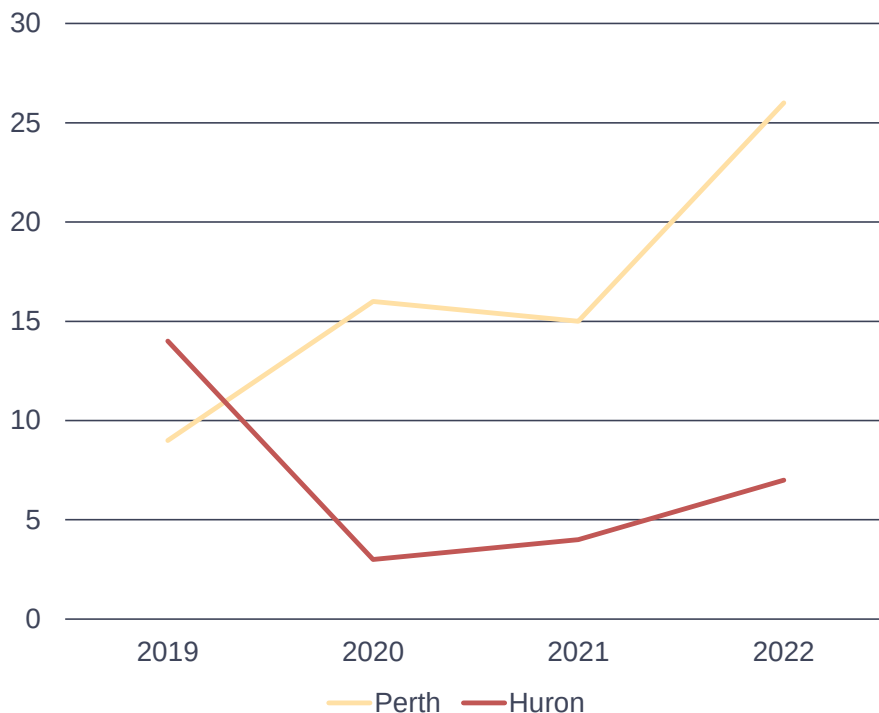


of people in **Perth**
feel safe walking
after dark



of people in **Stratford**
feel safe walking
after dark

School Bus-Related Incidents



Graph 10: School Bus-Related Incidents

Source: OPP and Stratford Police



Additional Capacity is Needed to Stop Intimate Partner Violence

While intimate partner violence calls appear to be declining, information from women's shelters and second stage housing providers indicates an increase in the acuity and complexity of gender-based violence cases.

	Perth 2020	Huron 2020	Perth 2021	Huron 2021	Perth 2022	Huron 2022
Police intimate partner violence calls	726	658	940	617	564	423
Intimate partner violence charges	276	225	168	168	218	74

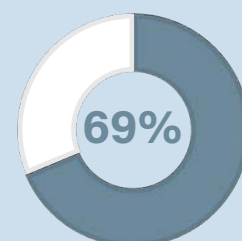
Table 3: Reported Intimate Partner Violence Occurrences

Source: Stop VAW; DART

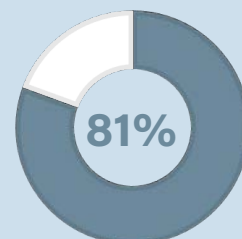
Most Indigenous Residents, Immigrants and Visible Minorities Have Faced Recent Discrimination

According to the 2021 report on discrimination by the Huron County Immigration Partnership, Indigenous peoples are the most likely to experience discrimination in Perth and Huron, followed by immigrants and visible minorities.

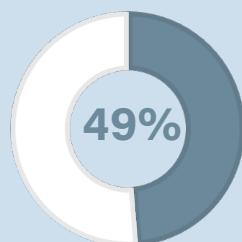
Percentage of People Experiencing Discrimination



Immigrants & Visible Minorities



Indigenous Peoples



White Non-Immigrants

Factors Increasing Likelihood of Discrimination



	Recommendation	Individual / Community	Organizations Businesses	Municipal Gov.	Provincial /Federal Gov.
1	Individuals, community organizations, the education sector and other relevant partners find solutions related to decreasing screen time for youth.				
2	Service clubs, non-profits and municipalities continue and expand funding for free recreational programs, particularly for youth, increasing barrier-free opportunities for activity and social interaction.				
3	Municipal governments address declining physical activity levels through supporting the inclusion of active modes of transportation in infrastructure plans.				
4	Municipal governments use an equity and inclusion lens when designing new parks to enable physical activity opportunities for children and youth of all abilities, in addition to providing a gathering space for the entire community.				
5	Libraries across Perth-Huron continue supporting and expanding lending programs including passes and equipment to access parks and recreational opportunities.				
6	The Ontario Ministry of Education promote eating well by including mandatory curriculum teaching how to shop and prepare food.				
7	Provincial government works in collaboration with community partners to implement policies that strengthen alcohol regulations and introduce mandatory labelling.				
8	The municipal government ban non-tobacco flavoured vaping products ("vape") and restrict advertising and promotion.				
9	All levels of government, along with workplaces, create smoke-free and vape-free spaces.				
10	Community and government-funded organizations ensure there are vaping cessation programs for youth and adults.				

	Recommendation	Individual / Community	Organizations Businesses	Municipal Gov.	Provincial /Federal Gov.
11	Governments, academics, and public health officials continue studying public health measures to reduce risky behaviour in youth, including harm reduction and further restricting or banning of products which disproportionately appeal to youth.				
12	Provincial government increases resources and implements sustainable funding for graduation coach roles.				
13	Provincial government uses a broader assessment strategy including transferrable skills and competencies that are already part of the curriculum to better reflect the full scope of learning.				
14	Municipal government and community organizations work with community members to identify opportunities to enhance social infrastructure such as parks, libraries and recreation centres.				
15	All levels of government ensure polling stations offer learning opportunities for children to increase awareness among future voters.				
16	MPs, MPPs, schools and libraries collaborate, engage and excite children about the electoral process during election periods.				
17	Federal and provincial voter registration websites should include resources for young voters to increase engagement.				
18	The federal government should continue funding programs to increase women's participation in municipal leadership. (separate recommendations) Grassroots organizations in Perth-Huron should seek funding to support more diverse candidates.				
19	Service providers and community organizations work collaboratively to reduce the stigma related to mental health and addictions.				

	Recommendation	Individual / Community	Organizations Businesses	Municipal Gov.	Provincial /Federal Gov.
20	Federal and provincial governments consider funding the installation of school bus stop-arm cameras to enforce school bus-related infractions and collect better data on incidents.				
21	Community services raise awareness among drivers by increasing the number of public safety messages on local media around school bus safety rules prior to the start of the school year.				
22	All levels of government continue working towards a Vision Zero and Safe Systems approach to road safety including safe speeds, road design, vehicles, land use planning as well as post-crash care.				
23	Province should improve educational curricula around healthy relationships, gender expression and what constitutes violence, risk factors and warning signs, particularly to reach youth early in life.				
24	Provincial and municipal governments should provide sustainable funding for advocacy, education and coordination of VAW services and among systems which survivors frequently interact with.				
25	Municipal leadership in Perth-Huron, in partnership with other municipalities and regional community services, support the development of a discrimination reporting and referral tool geared towards recording and reporting accounts of discrimination, as well as directing people affected by discrimination to community resources and supports.				
26	Workplaces, local government, non-profits and community organizations engage in diversity education and training focused on reducing and preventing discrimination with an emphasis on countering stereotypes, encouraging perspective-taking and finding common ground.				
27	The provincial government funds the implementation of Community Safety and Well-Being Plans.				



A Strong Economy

Economic factors have a critical impact on quality of life. Employment is a significant contributor to overall quality of life. Employment, income and financial security directly impact one's ability to afford essentials such as adequate housing, food, energy, internet and transportation. Emotional, physical and mental well-being is connected to accessing these critical rights



**2020
median
household
income**

Perth
\$74,500

Huron
\$70,000

Ontario
\$79,500



**2020 median
one-person
household
income**

Perth
\$37,600

Huron
\$36,400

Ontario
\$39,200

Incomes in Perth-Huron are Lower Than Provincial Median

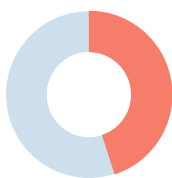
While low income is an indicator of living in poverty, it is not the same thing. Poverty is complex and can be described as not having enough money or access to resources to enjoy a decent standard of living. It extends beyond having enough income to afford only necessities — such as food or shelter — and is about exclusion. As such, poverty is difficult to define.

According to Living Wage Canada, a living wage is the hourly wage every adult in a household needs to earn to cover basic expenses and participate in the community. In Ontario, a specific living wage is calculated for every region.

The minimum wage is the lowest wage an employer can legally pay their staff. It is not based on a calculation of the cost of living, nor adjusted annually.

The most recent living wage for Perth-Huron, released in November 2023, is \$22.75 per hour. As of October 1, 2023, the Ontario minimum wage is \$16.65 per hour and \$15.60 for students.

The gap between minimum wage and living wage in Perth-Huron is over \$6 per hour.



45%*

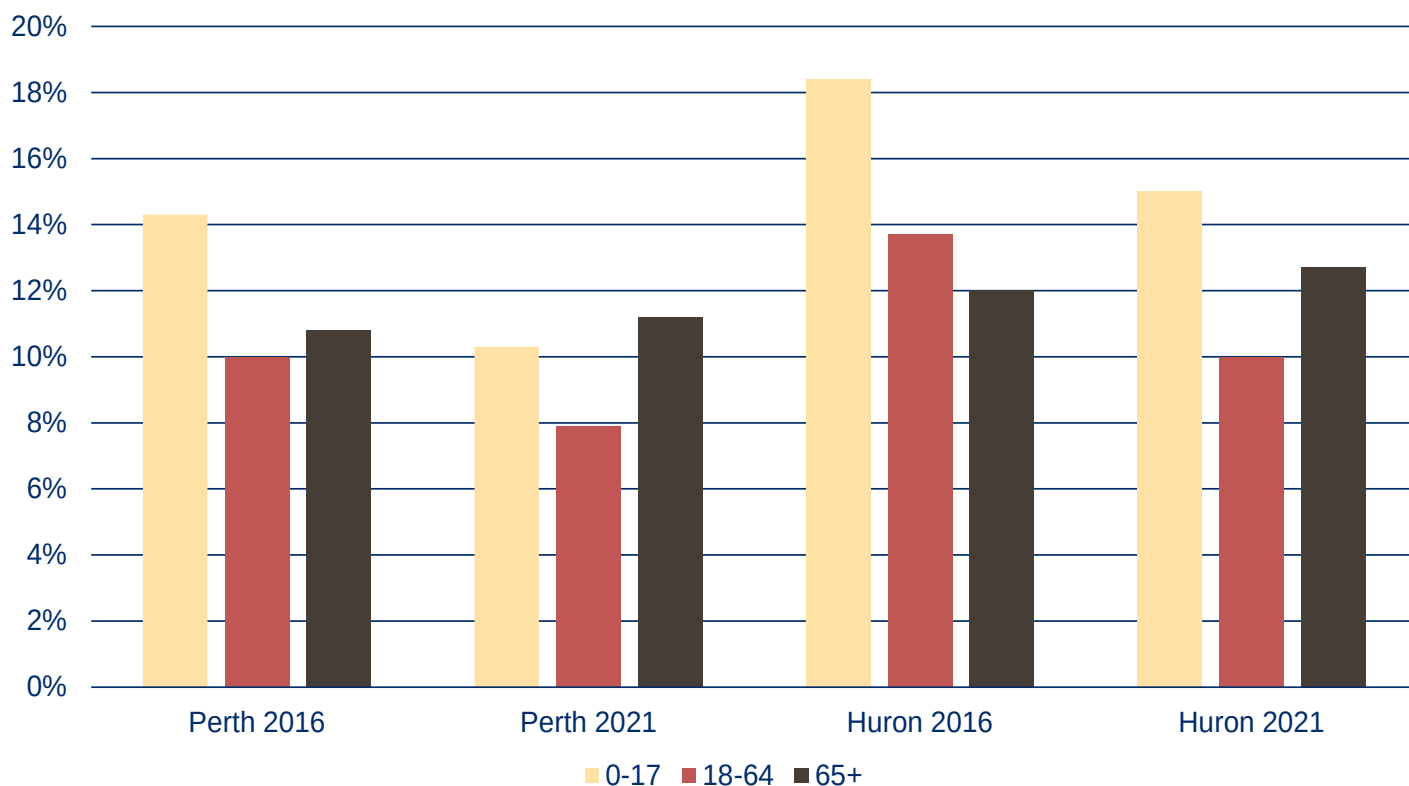
of residents over the age of 15 made less than a living wage as of 2020

**Calculated with 2020 taxfiler data and based upon 2022 Living Wage Rate*



The Number of Low-Income Households Dropped Due To Federal Assistance Programs

The LIM-AT is defined as half the median family income after tax and varies based upon family size. LIMs are the most frequently used measurement internationally, especially to make comparisons between countries. It is widely-used because it is simple to measure, but not necessarily because it is the best measure of poverty.



Low-Income Population Based on LIM-AT by Age (%)

Source: Statistics Canada

More of the Perth Population is Active in Labour Force, More Men

The labour force participation rate speaks to the proportion of the overall population over the age of 15 that is working or actively seeking work. In Perth, 66.3% of the population 15 and over is actively participating in the labour force. In this instance, a high participation rate and a low unemployment rate indicate a robust job market. However, the participation rates for men and women are significantly different. The participation rate for men is 72% and for women it is 60.8%. A similar trend is evident in Huron, with an overall participation rate of 60.9% but 66% for men and 55.9% for women.



The non-profit sector contributes

7.9%
to Ontario's GDP
and employs

844,000
people
77% of whom
are women.

Source: The Ontario Non-Profit Network

Historically, Perth-Huron Has One of the Lowest Unemployment Rates in Ontario



Unemployment rate in Stratford-Bruce Peninsula and Ontario

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2023. *Data has not been seasonally adjusted

Childcare

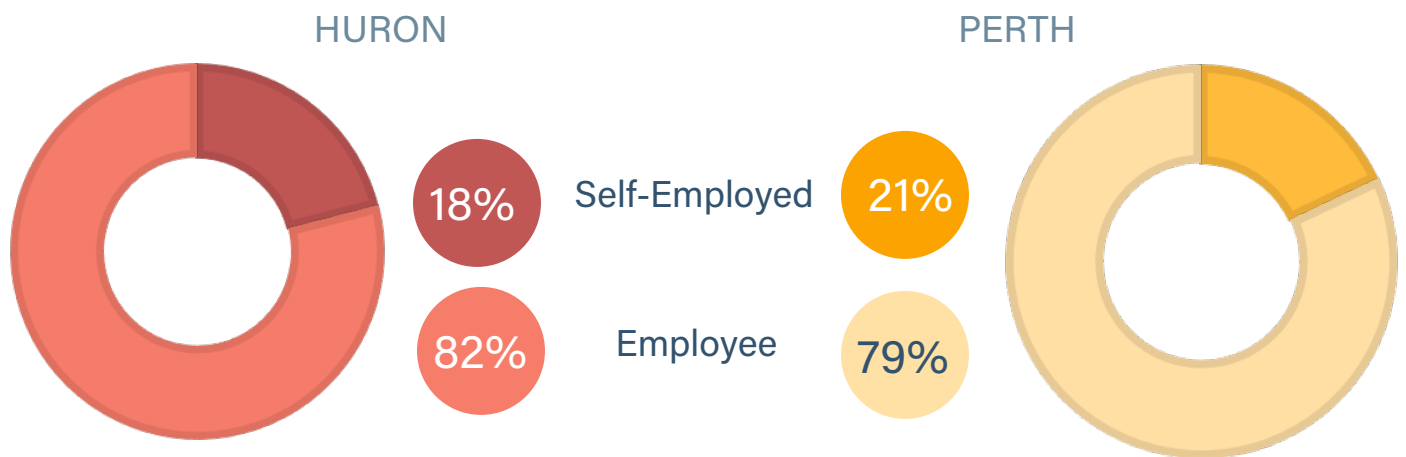
While the workforce in Canada rebounded following the COVID-19 pandemic, reports indicate that **workforce gaps between men and women remain and childcare has been identified as a significant contributing factor**. During the pandemic, more than 1.6 million women in Canada left the workforce. Women are more likely to work in sectors directly impacted by COVID-19, such as education, childcare, service and tourism. The biggest decline in participation rates was for women who had school-aged children. Even among men, participation gaps exist for those with children and those without. The largest participation gap is 18.4% between men and women with children under the age of six.

Among women who are not working, the main reasons they report being out of the workforce are personal and family responsibilities. **Women working part-time reported that childcare was the biggest reason they could not work full-time.**

1,636
children on
waitlist in Perth
265
children on
waitlist in Huron

The lack of early childhood educators has impacted the delivery of services in Perth-Huron. Licensed daycares, as well as multiple before and after school childcare programs, ceased operating in mid-2023.

A Greater Percentage of People in Perth-Huron are Self-Employed Compared to the Province



Self-Employed workers in Perth and Huron

Source: Statistics Canada

Housing is a Human Right

Housing is generally considered “affordable” if all shelter costs amount to less than 30% of a household’s before-tax income. Shelter costs include rent, mortgage payments and any necessary repairs. In our region, fewer homeowners than renters are living in unaffordable housing. In Perth, 17% of homeowners spend more than 30% of their income on shelter costs, while the number is 16% in Huron. By contrast, almost 33% of renter households in Perth and 31% in Huron are spending 30% or more of their income on shelter costs.

Subsidized housing refers to any housing subsidized in a variety of ways to make it financially accessible to low-income individuals and families. It includes rent-geared-to-income housing, co-op housing, social housing, public housing, government-assisted housing, non-profit housing and housing subsidized by rent supplements and housing allowances. In Perth, 14% of tenants are living in subsidized housing, while the number is 15% in Huron. **Waitlists for subsidized housing are long and, anecdotally, many individuals will have to wait as much as five years to move into housing.**

14%
of people in
Perth-Huron are
experiencing housing
poverty

129
people in Perth
are experiencing
homelessness

Housing Market is Tight

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) Rental Market Survey collects rent rates, availability and vacancy and turnover data for urban areas with populations of 10,000 or more. These are used in setting government and housing policies. The survey targets private structures on the market for at least three months with at least three rental units. While useful for urban areas such as the City or Stratford and North Perth (Listowel), data is not available for most areas in Perth-Huron.

The Alternate Average Market Rent (AAMR) collects accurate data on current rental market prices from residential advertisements in areas not covered by the CMHC survey. While the CMHC survey includes both occupied and available rental units, the AAMR covers units that are available for rent, providing an accurate reflection of rental prices. The AAMR also covers structures with 1-2 units and is not only restricted to structures with three or more units. Many units in both the Perth and Huron rental markets are owned by landowners with only one or two units.



The median household earning \$73,286 spends 29% on rent



The median one-adult household earning \$37,000 spends 46% on rent

	2020 AAMR from CMHC	2021 Service Manager Area Rental Scan	% Difference
One bedroom	\$889	\$1,253	41%
Two bedrooms	\$1,034	\$1,487	44%
Three plus bedrooms	\$1,182	\$1,894	60%

Comparison Between CMHC AAMRs and Local Rental Housing Costs

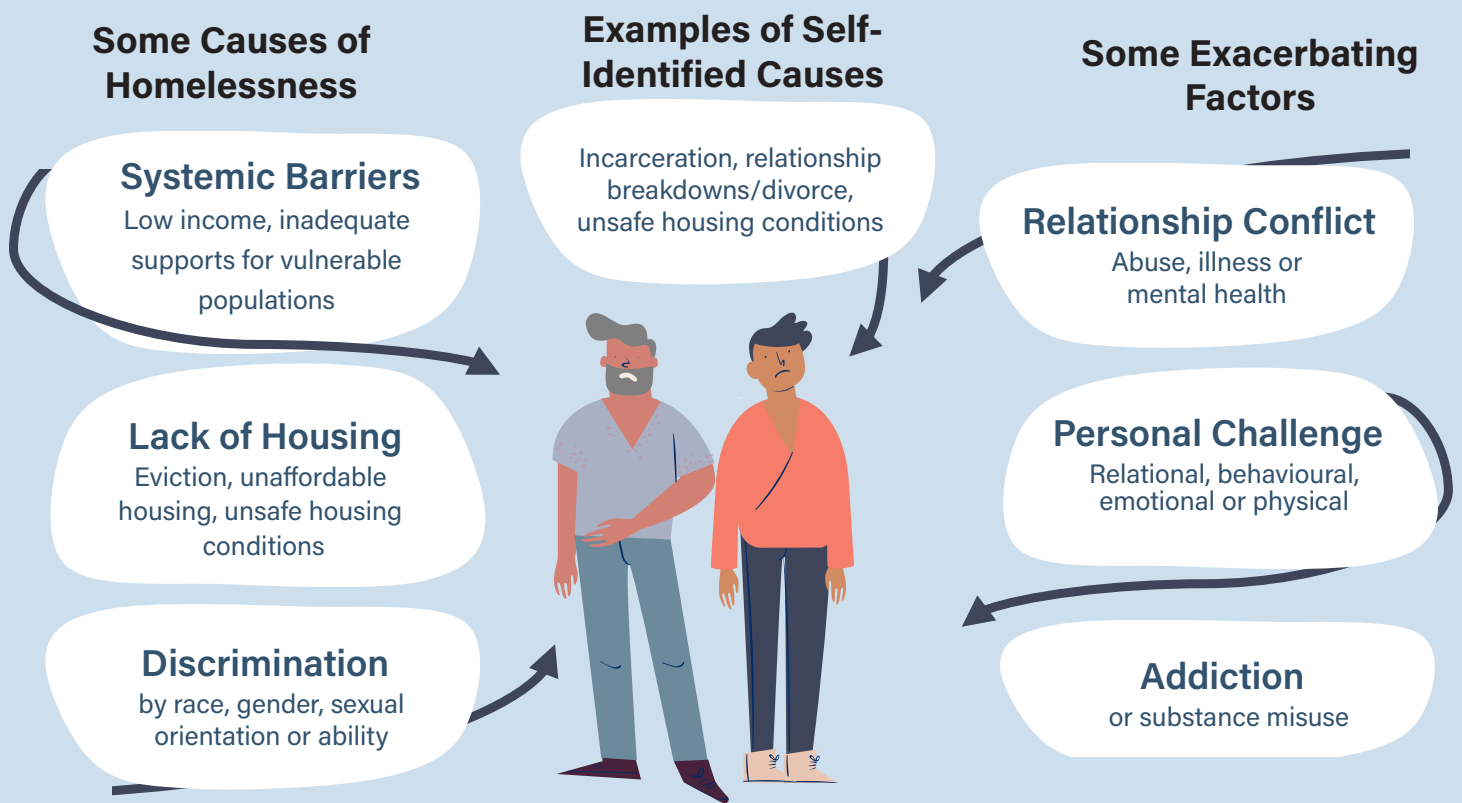
City of Stratford. (2021). 2021-2 Request Alternate Average Market Rents Business Case.

**The CMHC does not collect rental data in Huron due to a small population size. Instead, the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) data is used for the Huron County comparison.*

	2022 AAMR from COHB*	2022 Service Manager Area Rental Scan	% Difference
One bedroom	\$954	\$1,345	41%
Two bedrooms	\$1,144	\$1,428	25%
Three plus bedrooms	\$1,381	\$1,800	30%

Comparison Between COHB AAMRs and Local Rental Housing Costs

Huron County. (2022)



Energy Poverty is Higher in Rural Areas

Households experience energy poverty when they face significant challenges meeting home energy needs, paying for home energy costs or affording other necessities because of energy costs. Households experiencing energy poverty are significantly more likely to suffer from poorer general and mental health. Households in rural regions are more likely to experience energy poverty than households in urban areas.

Several municipalities within Perth-Huron are not serviced by natural gas. This means households are paying more to heat their homes and water, increasing the cost of living significantly. Additionally, there are competitive disadvantage for businesses. Portions of Ashfield-Colbourne-Wawanosh, Morris-Turnberry and Perth East do not have natural gas service.

In Stratford, approximately 39% of households spend more than 6% of their income on energy costs, meaning they have a high to extreme home energy cost burden.

Internet Access and Broadband Investment is Needed

Internet access has become a necessity for nearly all of us. The internet enables access to information, education, healthcare and, increasingly, employment in remote and rural communities. Many municipalities have 91–100% coverage, meaning over 90% of the municipality has internet access. Howick ranks lowest in terms of broadband coverage in Perth-Huron, followed by Perth East. Municipal governments have made high-speed broadband internet access a priority and significant infrastructure investments have been or will be made.

6% 

Any household that spends more than 6% of after-tax income on home energy costs is considered to live in energy poverty.

	Recommendation	Individual & Community	Businesses & Organization	Municipal Gov.	Provincial /Federal Gov.
1	Employers increase their rates of pay to a living wage and certify with the Ontario Living Wage Network.				
2	Employers currently paying a living wage ensure procurement policies and supply chain decisions reflect the local living wage.				
3	The provincial government raises the minimum wage to a living wage.				
4	Employers in all sectors perform both a salary audit to collect gender pay discrepancy data and address any pay inequities that emerge.				
5	The provincial government increases social assistance rates to the equivalent of a living wage so recipients can more adequately meet their basic needs, increase earnings exemptions and exemption rates for recipients and index rates to inflation.				
6	All levels of government establish policies that support income-based solutions to food insecurity including a living wage and guaranteed income.				
7	Provincial and municipal government increases funding and resources to support and encourage small business entrepreneurship.				
8	The federal government extends the interest-free full loan repayment period (i.e., the qualifying period for partial loan forgiveness) by at least one year, to December 31, 2024, for Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) and Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF) loans.				
9	All levels of government provide stable, long-term and flexible operational funding for nonprofits that keeps pace with inflation and reflects the true costs of delivering programs and services.				
10	Employers provide as much flexibility as feasible to accommodate the diverse needs of the workforce.				

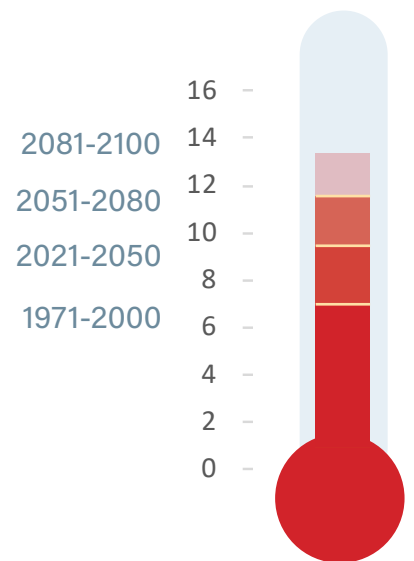
	Recommendation	Individual & Community	Businesses & Organization	Municipal Gov.	Provincial /Federal Gov.
11	The federal government and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation utilize an alternative methodology for the Rental Market Survey to collect data in rural areas that is both reliable and reflective of rural communities and their housing markets.				
12	All levels of government collaborate with the private and non-profit sectors to incentivize and facilitate the development of affordable housing, particularly tailored to rural municipalities.				
13	The provincial government increases funding for municipalities and non-profits to expand access to and availability of supportive and transitional housing, as well as other emergency and long-term supports and services.				
14	Governments and utility providers apply a human rights lens when providing utility services to rural customers, ensuring all customers have universal access to services and clean energy.				
15	The federal government allocates funds for low-income households to improve energy efficiency, move towards net-zero emissions targets and decrease energy poverty for vulnerable households.				
16	Government and providers invest further in universal access to broadband and cellular service, ensuring all residents have the critical infrastructure to support their inclusion.				
17	Governments, community members and businesses explore alternatives to a fixed route transit system to meet transportation needs.				
18	Municipal governments consider introducing a Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) to offset other budgetary items.				
19	The provincial government makes the Ontario Staycation Tax Credit an annual offering, providing economic support to the tourism and hospitality sector.				

A Clean Environment

The environment that surrounds us is fundamental to our existence. Our forests, rivers, lakes and soil allow us to have the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe. Our health and prosperity rely on the natural world and we must keep it healthy in order to survive. For Indigenous peoples, their relationship to the land is spiritual. In our area, there are reasons to feel concerned about the environment, from a rise in Special Air Quality Statements to the state of our forests and wetlands.

Our Climate is Changing

Climate change refers to shifts in temperature and weather patterns (such as precipitation and wind) over long periods of time, often decades or more. Ontario uses a two-level air quality alert system. The number of Special Air Quality statements has been increasing since 2019, going from zero to three per year. Worsening air quality can be attributed to pollutants — including greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions — as well as the impacts of climate change, chiefly increasing temperatures and more wildfires.



Projected Annual Temperatures in Perth, Stratford and Huron (C)

Source: Environment and Climate Change Canada (2023, January 26). Perth, ON. Climate Data Canada

OUR WATERSHED SCORES IN COMPARISON TO THE PROVINCE

Most of Perth-Huron is covered by three conservation authorities: Maitland Valley, Ausable Bayfield and Upper Thames River. These three authorities release watershed report cards measuring groundwater quality, surface water quality, forest conditions and wetland conditions. The report cards allow authorities to benchmark conditions, measure change, identify issues and track progress for actions.

Perth and Huron in Comparison to Ontario

Surface Water (rivers, lakes, streams)	SIMILAR to ON
Ground Water (important source of water found in cracks in soil, sand and rock)	HIGHER than ON
Forests and Wetlands	LOWER than ON

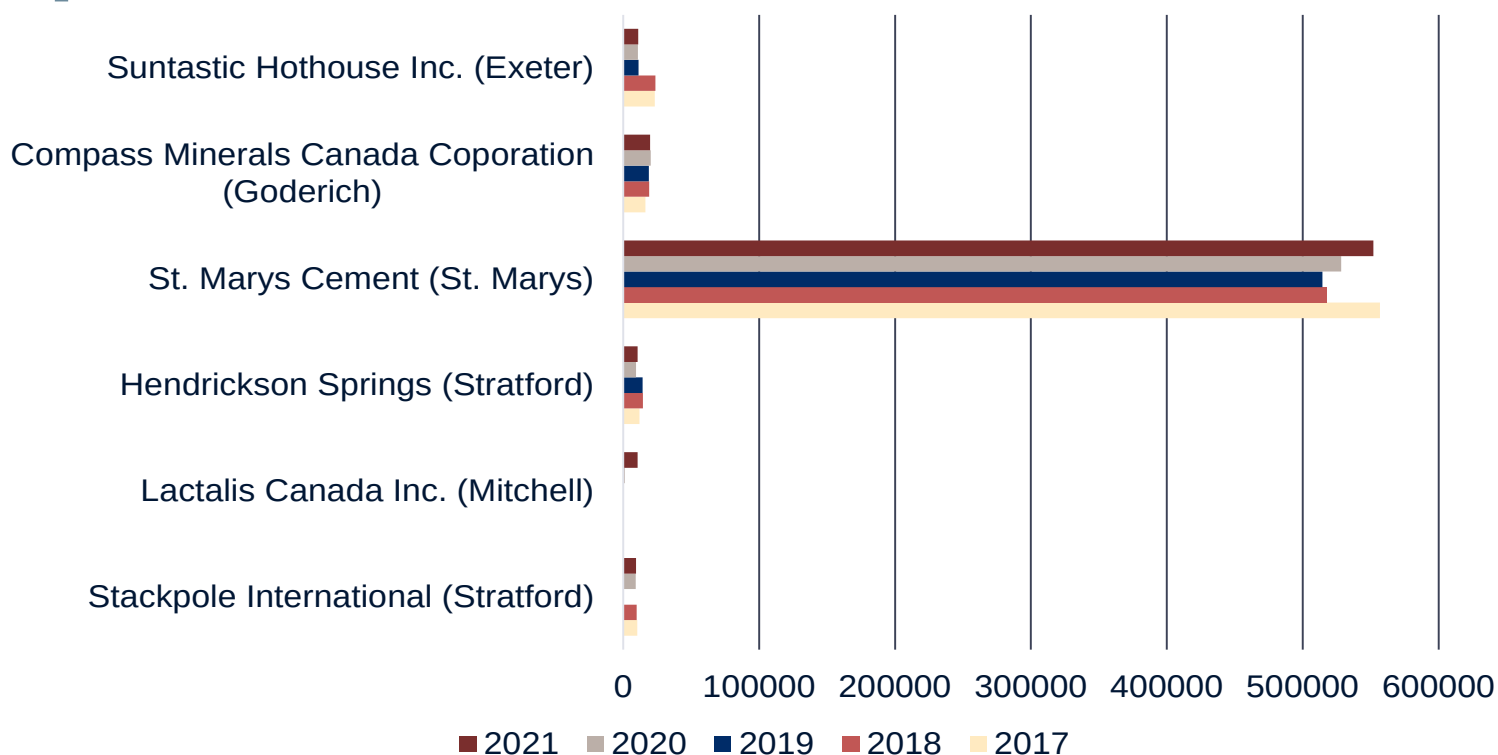


Our Six Largest Industrial Emitters

The national Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program (GHGRP) collects information annually on GHG emissions from facilities emitting 10 kilotonnes of GHGs or more. The GHGRP is mandatory and data is reported to Environment and Climate Change Canada. Industry is a backbone of Canada's economy and is significant to our region. In Perth-Huron, six facilities meet the threshold and must report: St. Marys Cement (St. Marys), Compass Minerals (Goderich), Hendrickson Canada ULC (Stratford), Stackpole International (Stratford), Lactalis Canada Inc (West Perth) and Suntastic Hothouse Inc (South Huron). St. Marys Cement is by far the largest emitter, emitting more than five times as much as the other five facilities combined. Their emissions data, for the years these companies reported in the last five years, is shown in the following tables.

The GHGs include:

- Carbon dioxide (CO₂)
- Methane (CH₄)
- Nitrous oxide (N₂O)
- Hydrofluorocarbons (HFC)
- Perfluorocarbons (PFC)
- Sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆)



GHG Emissions (kt) of Large Emitter Facilities

Source: Statistics Canada. Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program (GHGRP).

Diversion Rates

Region	kg/hhld/yr	2019	2020	2021
Perth and Huron	Waste	289.97	322.49	345.94
	Recycling	230.04	229.24	238.78
	Diversion %	44%	42%	41%
Stratford	Waste	394.74	365.37	349.33
	Recycling	259.93	311.69	343.88
	Diversion %	40%	46%	50%

Diversion Rates

Source: Bluewater Recycling

Recommendation	Individual & Community	Businesses & Organization	Municipal Gov.	Provincial /Federal Gov.
Climate change mitigation focuses on the reduction or prevention of climate change and its impacts. To mitigate climate change, actions must be taken to decrease GHG emissions. This can be done by finding other ways to heat buildings and replacing fueled vehicles and equipment with electric options				
Individuals can perform simple actions to reduce E. coli levels in surface water and improve beach water quality for everyone. Actions include: ▪ Proper disposal of animal and human waste ▪ Prevention of livestock grazing near lakes ▪ Maintaining septic systems and decreasing the use of fertilizer and manure near lakes. ▪ Not feeding wildlife — particularly geese and seagulls — at home and in public spaces ▪ Reducing or eliminating the use of backyard pesticides ▪ Implementing farming best practices including keeping manure storage in a flat area and covered to limit runoff ▪ Implementing measures including buffer zones near lakes to prevent livestock grazing, as well as effectively managing stormwater runoff, could also have positive impacts on E. coli levels.				
Individuals work to protect groundwater sources by properly disposing of chemicals. To find out where and when disposal is offered, check with local waste management services and/or municipal government.				
Limit the use of chemicals, including fertilizers and winter salt, and always use and store these chemicals correctly to help protect groundwater.				
Ensuring unused wells are decommissioned and agricultural landowners consult OMAFRA's source protection guide for best practices to protect vulnerable groundwater sources.				

Recommendation	Individual & Community	Businesses & Organization	Municipal Gov.	Provincial /Federal Gov.
Landowners, community groups, governments and businesses increase the forest cover and improve the sustainability of woodlots and urban forests in consultation with local conservation authorities. Biodiversity protects forests from insects and diseases, enhances resilience to climate variations and provides habitat for wildlife.				
Municipal governments share information on the benefits of urban forests to increase knowledge and awareness of the importance of the canopy in improving the land, air and water quality. They can also support private landowners through stewardship programs to preserve and enhance woodlots, among other environmental protection activities, and even offer access to provincial tax relief programs.				
Policy should change to transfer the issue of waste management to producers and incentivize them to reduce waste and create products for recycling. Currently, the cost of waste management falls mainly on municipalities, which means taxpayers.				
Municipal governments ensure that all residents, including small, rural and remote communities, have access to recycling.				
Provincial and federal governments increase funding to green infrastructure programs with a dedicated stream for natural infrastructure projects, particularly to replace and readapt aging water, wastewater and stormwater systems.				
Municipalities and associated community organizations in Perth-Huron promote the benefits of compost and best practices for usage. Compost also needs to be made easily accessible to all residents and groups that could benefit from using it.				

Thank you for reading Quality of Life in Perth & Huron County 2023. We hope these reports act as ongoing resources. If you work with a local organization, perhaps they will help you apply for funding or create appropriate programs and policies. If you are an advocate, perhaps they will inform your priorities or message. More broadly, we hope these reports help all Perth-Huron residents understand their communities better. We also hope the recommendations within help individuals, organizations and elected officials make informed decisions to support everyone in our region.

These reports do not provide a simple measure of Quality of Life in our area. They present findings we can celebrate and issues we can work on. With this knowledge in hand, it's up to us to decide: What do we love about our community? What do we wish we could change? What kind of community do we want to become?

With this knowledge in hand, let's create the Perth & Huron Counties of the future together.







United Way
Perth-Huron



**Social Research &
Planning Council**

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