

NORTH SIMCOE AND AREA'S

VitalSigns.®

2023

NATURE • COMMUNITY • GEORGIAN BAY

FOOD
SECURITY

HEALTH CARE

WATER
QUALITY

LIVING
WAGES

AFFORDABLE
HOUSING

NATURAL HABITAT

HURONIA
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION



LA FONDATION
COMMUNAUTAIRE
DE LA HURONIE



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

VitalSigns.®



Nikeyaa noojimowin miikanaans
Along the Healing Path
GBDSS student mural, Tay Trail, Waubaushene

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Today we are privileged to live, work, and play on the traditional and Treaty territory of the Anishinabek Nation; specifically, the Chippewas Tri-Council comprised of Beausoleil First Nation, Chippewas of Rama First Nation and the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. This territory is included in the Dish with One Spoon Wampum, the pre-confederation Treaty 5 and Treaty 16, and included within the Williams Treaties of 1923. The Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee Confederacy have also walked on this territory over time. This is also the home to many Indigenous Nations from across Turtle Island, including the Inuit and Métis. The Original Peoples lived a life of stewardship rather than exploitation.

We are all Treaty people and share the responsibility to protect and preserve our first Mother, the earth, and to ensure that she is here for future generations. We understand that the standard of living we enjoy here is as a result of thousands of years of stewardship by the original inhabitants and the inequitable taking of the land from them.

We are dedicated to honouring Indigenous self-determination, history and culture and are committed to moving forward in the spirit of reconciliation and respect with all First Nation, Métis and Inuit people.

Photo courtesy of the Wye Marsh



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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 17

The Huronia Community Foundation is committed to continued support of the community by hosting further conversations on the community's priority issues, and championing groups and organizations involved in making the North Simcoe region a better place for all.



ACCESS TO OUR DATA IS PUBLIC

Community Foundations of Canada has provided a website for us where relevant Stats Canada data, survey analysis and other reference data and reports are located.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Welcome to the Huronia Community Foundation's 2022/2023 Vital Signs® report.

Huronia Community Foundation (HCF) has been working to strengthen our community since the end of the second millennium. For 23 years, we've been connecting the generosity of donors with the energy and ideas of people and charities across our region. HCF looks upon ourselves as the charity for charities. By using our knowledge to identify the needs of the community, we connect people, families, and businesses with causes that inspire them – pooling resources and expertise to achieve the greatest impact.

Vital Signs is a national program led by community foundations and coordinated by Community Foundations of Canada that leverages local knowledge to measure the vitality of our communities and support action toward improving our quality of life.

The community knowledge gained through Vital Signs allows HCF to make data-driven decisions that respond to the needs of our communities. Priorities identified within the report will guide our decision-making as a community leader and funder and result in the ability to move the needle on the most pressing issues.

Our volunteer committee has worked tirelessly to collect and combine the data from numerous sources. For their efforts, I am truly grateful. I am also thankful for the support of our sponsors, and funders for their generosity which has allowed us to complete the report and provide online access to the data. Lastly, I would like to thank our community partners who actively got involved and shared their information with us. It is partnerships such as these that make our community stronger and more resilient.

I hope that you find this report valuable. Please be sure to share it with your family and friends.

Don McCready, President
Huronia Community Foundation

THE UNITED NATIONS' 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries — developed and developing — in global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go together with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth — all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.” Find out more about the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (1).

This Vital Signs report focuses on the SDGs below. These themes are the priorities identified by the community through the HCF surveys.



If you are looking at the printed edition of Vital Signs, you will see that references have been provided. If you’d like to see the material, please visit the online edition of the report at: [Link to Platform](#) and you can click through to all of the referenced material.

METHODOLOGY

This report is a result of Community Consultation through organization, environment and resident surveys and focus groups. Data has also been collected from Federal, Provincial, County, and local organizations.

Analysis of survey results were conducted in collaboration with the students in the Research and Innovation Program at Georgian College. The report reflects what we heard and wherever possible is the Community’s own Voice.

THE VITAL SIGNS TEAM

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WHO WE ARE: YOUR COMMUNITY, YOUR VOICE

North Simcoe and Area's VitalSigns®

Vital Signs is a community check-up conducted by Community Foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of our communities and identifies significant trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. Vital Signs is coordinated nationally by Community Foundations of Canada.

This Vital Signs report focuses on North Simcoe and area (Midland, Tiny, Tay, Penetanguishene and includes Christian Island and the Township of Georgian Bay). Throughout the work we are aware of the emphasis by Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) of the Sustainable Development Goals (1) set out by the United Nations and affirmed by Canada in the 2030 Agenda (2). The platform where the detailed Stats Canada data is shared, as well as expanded research and resources, reflects these and is linked (3). It is supported by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (4). Please visit the site if you are interested in any further details on the data used in this report.

In March of 2021 as part of an RBC Future Launch Community Challenge (5) we surveyed youth in the region asking questions about their understanding of community and what youth saw as the most pressing challenges. Next to the pandemic, youth pointed to Affordable Housing, Climate Action and Mental Health as major concerns. With this in mind, our Vital Signs team started gathering data early in 2022, asking questions, identifying resources, and talking to folks working with those most affected. The SDGs focused on in this report come from the data and what the community told us was important.

Our Vital Signs team are all volunteers with varied backgrounds and experiences. Each member, however, has been committed to the

process and understands the importance of supporting the community by holding a mirror to its strengths and challenges as accurately as possible. Where local data was hard to find, we leaned on broader research to inform us and consider how this might fit with what we learned here at home.

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NORTH SIMCOE & AREA: WHERE THE ENVIRONMENT IS AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING

People connected to North Simcoe and area, feel that its beauty and abundance of nature are among the top reasons for making the region their home (1). The area is home to a national park, several provincial parks and conservation reserves, and spans 2 Ecozones - the Ontario Shield Ecozone in the north; and the Mixedwood Plains Ecozone in the south, providing diverse habitats that support high biodiversity (2).

KEY FACTS

- Over 1,100 km² of land makes up North Simcoe & Area.
- As of 2021, there are over 51,000 residents in North Simcoe & Area, an increase of over 10% since the 2016 census.
- Over 1,500 km of shoreline on Georgian Bay, with an estimated 66% around islands, plus 131 km along the Trent-Severn Waterway (3).
- The region has more than 100 inland lakes.

WATER QUALITY

While North Simcoe and area, generally does not lack access to safe, quality water resources for drinking and recreation, there is concern

about aspects of water quality in some areas. Issues along the eastern Georgian Bay coastline and within Severn Sound, which is a collection of embayments at the southeast end of Georgian Bay, such as overgrowth of algae, combined sewer overflows during storm events, and water levels fluctuations were identified as high priority for action (4).



Overall, Remedial Action Plan targets for Severn Sound are being met for phosphorus, chlorophyll *a*, water clarity and dissolved oxygen, with exceedances in certain areas around Honey Harbour.

Concentrations of sodium and chloride, the main components of de-icing salts, are increasing regionally, and sodium levels in some drinking water sources are a potential concern for those on sodium restricted diets. Algae that can produce offensive taste and odour compounds or toxins are present in the area, and there have been increased reports of blooms. This can have an impact on the health of people and wildlife. There are instances where some local rivers do not meet Provincial Water Quality Objectives for phosphorus and suspended sediments, although trends generally show improvement. (5)

DID YOU KNOW?

- There are over 7,000 private wells (6), plus 87 municipal wells and 4 municipal surface water intakes, servicing thousands of residents (7).
- North Simcoe features over 80 swimming areas and beaches (8).

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change can be defined as long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, which can negatively impact human and environmental health.



As a result of these shifts, more summer heat



MONITORING LAKE HEALTH

Photo courtesy of Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA)

warnings and extreme storms may occur, as well as reduced air quality. Long-term weather shifts can also impact water quality, and the ability to grow food. Once a 1.5°C global temperature rise is reached, the risk of food and water shortages as well as extreme weather events drastically increases.

- If patterns continue, within the next 50 years, the climate of the Great Lakes Basin will increase by 2-4°C (9).
- Over the last 50 years, surface water temperatures averaged across Severn Sound have increased by 2.3°C. Warmer waters are a key risk factor leading to more frequent algae blooms (10).

DID YOU KNOW?

LOSS OF HABITAT, NATURAL HERITAGE, AND FARMLAND

Intact, diverse habitats are critical for plants and animals to thrive, creating balanced healthy ecosystems. Wetland habitat loss due to development is a major concern, along with continued spread of invasive species. These issues contribute to other environmental problems, such as loss of forests and wildlife habitat, and degraded water quality (11). There are also concerns that farmland is being lost due to development, which represents a permanent loss of productive soils (12).



LAND COVERAGE & INVASIVE SPECIES

- Over 70% of North Simcoe and area are under natural land cover that provides wildlife habitat.
- Just over 15% of North Simcoe and area is productive agricultural land and located in the Simcoe County portion (13).
- Nearly 50 Provincially Significant Wetlands (14)
- More than 40 Species at Risk (15)
- Over 80 invasive species identified, with targeted monitoring and/or management for 8 species (16)

FOCUSING ON SOLUTIONS

The Vital Signs surveys indicated that residents and business owners are concerned about the environment, identifying issues like water quality, climate change and loss of habitat, natural heritage and farmland as top issues (17). Across North Simcoe and area, there are a number of volunteers participating in a variety of citizen science programs, demonstrating the power of positive action by those who are connected to their local environment. To combat environmental issues, solutions must include introducing new technologies, engaging and empowering people from all ages, going beyond the normal scope of outreach, adapting existing policies, working with stakeholders, promoting active stewardship, and strategically allocating funding (18).

THREATS & TRENDS TO KEEP AN EYE ON:

- Sodium and chloride
- Nutrients and algae blooms
- Invasive species
- Climate change

Huronian Community Foundation recognizes the significant contribution of Severn Sound Environmental Association Staff and Alexandra Sbrocchi, University of Guelph student to the creation of the Environmental section of this report.

To get more in-depth on this issue, and potential solutions, go to **Call to Action**.



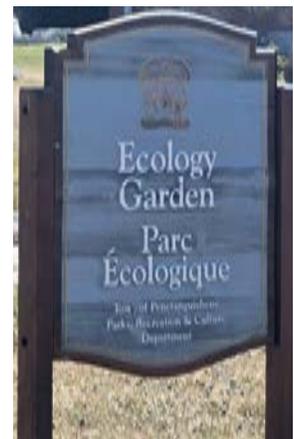
THE WYE MARSH PROVIDES EDUCATION AND DAY CAMP ADVENTURES

Photo courtesy of the Wye Marsh.



BRIGHT LIGHT

A Climate Change Solutions Park announced in September 2022, is a partnership between the Town of Penetanguishene and York University, and will be located in the Penetanguishene Ecology Garden at 144 Fox Street (19).



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HEALTH CARE & WELLBEING: A FOCUS ON ACCESS TO CARE, MENTAL HEALTH AND THE OPIOID CRISIS



Many factors affect the health of individuals and communities. In addition to genetics and lifestyle, the environment, the economy and social factors all influence how healthy we are. This means that to achieve Good Health and Wellbeing for All, communities need to have both health care services AND access to the social determinants of health like housing, employment, income, and healthy physical environments (1). In this section we highlight indicators of population health and health services.

ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR OLDER ADULTS

The percentage of older adults (aged 65+) in North Simcoe is higher (25.5%) than Ontario (17.6%). Around 3.1% of North Simcoe area residents meet criteria for frailty which is higher than for Ontario (2.2%) (2). These individuals have multiple physical and social concerns that put them at risk for poorer health outcomes.

By dialing 211 or going online to

CommunityConnection.ca older adults can get information on services from all agencies in the region, including support with transportation to appointments. Many agencies are registered charities that rely on donations to maintain services.

Wait time and wait list data are not publicly available for most services, with the exception of long term care (LTC). There were 463 LTC beds in North Simcoe and a total of 1,251 names on the wait lists as of April 2022 (3). While 70% of people seeking long term care are able to access a facility close to home, the wait can be lengthy. The available data shows that **9 out of 10 individuals waited up to 2.5 years for a long term care bed (4)**. To support them while they are waiting, the County of Simcoe Paramedic Service has launched a new (5) program that helps people to manage their chronic conditions at home. 684 home visits were made to 117 patients in the North Simcoe region (22). The County of Simcoe is also launching the Behaviour Support Transition Unit at Georgian Village (6), which will provide support to people who need extra care to return home or to long term care.

PRIMARY CARE

90% of residents of North Simcoe have a primary care provider, either a physician or nurse practitioner (7). Despite this, 40% have challenges with timely access to medical services (8). This is consistent with data



COMMUNITY REACH PROVIDED 7,214 ACCESSIBLE RIDES IN MIDLAND FROM JAN TO SEPT 2022. MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS ACCOUNTED FOR ALMOST 50% OF THESE.

Photo courtesy of Community Reach.

collected in other parts of Ontario showing that only 40.8% of residents are able to see their family doctor or someone else on the same day or next day when they are ill (9).

Another innovation to improve access to services is virtual care including apps and video appointments. Many local agencies are now offering virtual as well in person services. 87% of respondents to the Vital Signs survey said they have reliable Internet, so they are able to take advantage of these new virtual options (10).



Photo courtesy of the YMCA Simcoe/Muskoka.

MENTAL HEALTH INDICATORS

In 2020, the percentage of people experiencing a mental illness in the previous two years was slightly higher in the North Simcoe area (22.5%) compared to Ontario (18.5%) (11).

Many reports suggest that since then, the mental health of residents has worsened due to the impacts of the pandemic. In particular, certain groups like health care workers, youth and people living with mental illnesses have experienced declining mental health.

A) HEALTH CARE WORKER MENTAL HEALTH

Health care workers faced a high degree of uncertainty during the pandemic with equipment shortages, staff illness, isolation, visitor limitations, inequitable pandemic incentives, and caring for severely ill patients. Findings of a study by Georgian College and Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care found that hospital workers in North Simcoe experienced increased staff burnout and stress as a result of the pandemic (12).

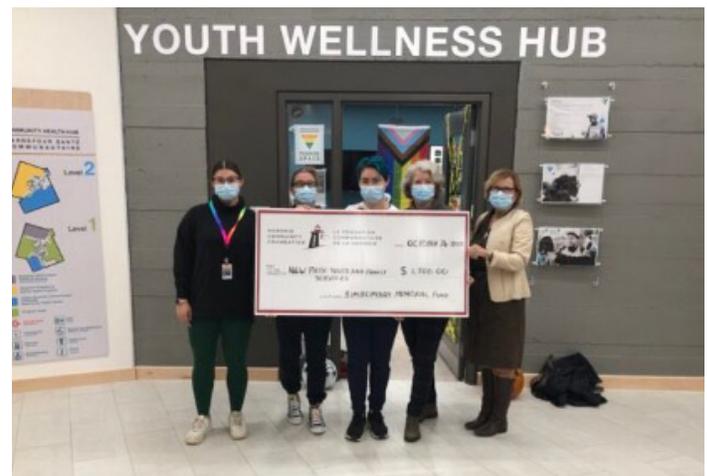
B) YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

When it comes to mental health, early identification and intervention is critical. Most mental health concerns start to develop

before age 25. A key finding from the 2019 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Study was the high level of mental health problems among youth. Almost 31% of Simcoe Muskoka students report their mental health as fair or poor, with more females (42%) than males (20%) reporting fair or poor mental health. A larger percentage of students in lower socioeconomic groups perceive their mental health as fair or

poor compared to other socioeconomic groups (13). The impact of isolation, loss of employment opportunities and disrupted learning during the pandemic have only made the situation worse.

Mental Health agencies are implementing new ways to respond to the growing need. For example, the **Newpath Quick Access Mental Health Clinic** (14) provides an appointment with a mental health professional for children, youth, and their families. This clinic was the first recipient of the Huronia Community Foundation's new Bimbombay Memorial Fund (15).



Source: <https://newpath.ca/2022/11/18/the-bimbombay-memorial-fund/>

C) PEOPLE LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

People living with mental illness and substance use disorders are another segment of our community that was significantly affected by the pandemic. Specifically, isolation, a toxic

drug supply and reduced access to in person health services all contributed to the ongoing opioid crisis. In North Simcoe, there were 35 opioid related deaths between 2020 and the first half of 2022 (January to June) (16). The municipality of Midland had a disproportionate number of opioid related deaths, with twice as many deaths (46.7 per 100,000) than would be expected in other parts of Ontario (18.0 per 100,000) (17).

LOOKING FOR HELP WITH MENTAL HEALTH OR SUBSTANCE USE CHALLENGES? CALL CONNEXONTARIO HELPLINE 24/7 AT 1.866.531.2600. IT'S FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

Opioid related overdoses occur in all demographic groups, but some groups are more affected than others (18). Males and young adults (25-44 years of age) account for the majority of opioid related overdoses in Simcoe Muskoka. Most individuals who had an opioid overdose had been in contact with health care, social assistance, employment or justice supports. Others may never reach out for help for fear of discrimination. This concern goes beyond people with substance use challenges. 29% of respondents to the Vital Signs survey said they avoid seeking certain services due to fear of discrimination. The types of services people are reluctant to access are health care (10%), community events (9%), police (8%) and mental health services (8%) (19). Local health care leaders recognize that discrimination is

BRIGHT LIGHT



The County of Simcoe's Community Paramedicine Home Visit Program offers "integrated, in-home care by Community Paramedics and is available throughout the County of Simcoe at no cost to the patient. 129 Visits were made to 35 Shelter patients in Midland (22). Paramedics receive additional training in key treatment areas. They maintain a direct connection with the patient's Primary Care Provider and can minimize the need for 9-1-1 calls and hospital visits (21).

a barrier to access and recommended *more training on diversity and inclusion* as one of the strategies to improve services (20).

To get more in-depth on this issue, and potential solutions, go to **Call to Action**.

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"THE GREATEST WEALTH IS HEALTH."

- VIRGIL, ANCIENT ROME POET



Photo courtesy of the YMCA Simcoe/Muskoka.

AGRICULTURE: CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

Ontario must maintain a strong agricultural base, in order to provide a sound food security system. Ontario agriculture provides over \$40 billion to the GDP, Ontario's agri-food industry has grown to account for roughly 30 percent of Canada's total economic activity in this sector (1). We produce over 200 varieties of products in the province. We must be mindful of some concerns that are and will have a major impact on our agricultural base.



FARMLAND PRESERVATION

According to the May 2019 Census Canada, we are losing 319 acres per day to development (2), a sharp increase from the 175 acres daily loss recorded in the 2016 Census. To put this in perspective, 319 acres can produce either, 23,500,000 apples, 75,600,000 carrots, 37,100,000 strawberries, 1,191,465 boxes of cereal and for fine dining 1,207,096 bottles of wine. It might be hard to imagine, only 5% of the total land base in Ontario can be used for agricultural production. **Ontario has 51% of the class 1 farmland in Canada** (3). The North Simcoe Agriculture Sector adds 6.3 million in wages to the economy (4). According to world growth population projections, we need to increase our production by 40% by 2050, to meet the food demands of the world. Sound land use planning needs to put in place to protect farmland.

Ontario is losing 319 acres per day to development (2).
May 2019, Census Canada

SUPPORT FOR BEST FARM MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

We, the agricultural community, are nature's stewards. We live, raise our families, and strive to survive operating our farm operations.

Lack of understanding about farm management practices and perceptions of environmental problems at the farm can generate an overly complicated legislative/onerous regulatory response. With ever increasing demands for better efficiency and productivity, scientists and farmers have been figuring out ways to increase crop productivity, use less water, and reduce negative impacts on the environment. This is accomplished by software/GPS development, gene and hybrid efficiency using sound science-based information and research. When it comes to pollution, climate change, protection of our land, water and air, the environment and agriculture suffer the quickest and with the clearest consequences. What will our food supply look like? The state of agriculture is a good overview of what we can expect our future to look like.

North Simcoe has 29,679 acres of farmland in production, with 67% of these in land crops. There are 172 farms, providing \$84m of export for North Simcoe.
-Economic Development Corporation North Simcoe



Photo courtesy of Paul Maurice, Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA).

AGRICULTURE: IT'S THE SOURCE OF OUR FOOD SUPPLY

Arguably the most important aspect of agriculture is that it's the source of our food supply (5). In Canada, we produce enough to feed close to 60M people, yet we have over 4M going hungry every day in Canada. In Ontario, 595,000 households have been identified as food insecure. This is unacceptable and we need to seriously address this issue. Healthy people are more productive and minimize the impact on our health care system.

In 2019, 58 % of all food produced in Canada was either lost or wasted (6). This represents 35.5M tonnes of lost food. If proper measures were taken, much of this could have been re-directed to good use. It is imperative that Ontario review our education curriculum regarding agriculture and it's many facets.

Submitted by Paul Maurice, November 2022, our Local representative to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA).

FOOD BANK USAGE ON THE RISE

- According to Foodbanks Canada, foodbank use is up 35% from 2019. In Ontario it has increased 42% and 1 in 3 visitors were first timers (7).
- Foodbank use quadruples in North Simcoe: Georgian Bay Foodbank reports number increased from 200 to 850 monthly clients from Dec. 2021. (8)

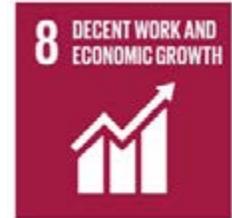
To get more in-depth on this issue, and potential solutions, go to **Call to Action**.

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JOBS, WAGES, AND LABOUR SHORTAGES: A KEY CONCERN FOR A THRIVING NORTH SIMCOE REGION

What we read and hear in national news headlines, about labour shortages and jobs going unfilled, is certainly reflected in North Simcoe and area.



HCF's own community survey (1) pointed to the fact that while unfilled jobs in North Simcoe region are abundant, many of them do not come with a living wage – a rate set at \$20.70 for 2022 for the area, up from \$19.05 in 2021 (2). Many local employers are struggling to fill open jobs — a problem which existed pre-pandemic, was exacerbated by the pandemic, and persists with ongoing retirements and worker movement.

Locally, jobs in healthcare (Registered Practical Nurses, Personal Support Workers, for example) and for A/Z drivers commonly go unfilled, along with skilled labour (such as carpenters) and lower skilled positions in the manufacturing sector (such as machine operators).

- Between 2019 and 2021, North Simcoe saw an overall 6% decline in the number of jobs in the area. The County of Simcoe saw a 7% decline, as did Ontario (3).
- Nationally, business revenues are struggling to catch up to 2019 levels, with 51.9% of businesses reporting lower revenues in 2021, and 55.2% of businesses with 1 to 4 employees reporting the same (4).

POINTS OF INTEREST

In 2022, nationally, the top labour shortages, when measured by job posting numbers, were: 1) sales and service occupations, 2) business, finance and administration occupations, and 3) trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations, with health occupations coming in at #5 (5).

The HCF surveys also revealed that 58% of employer respondents have trouble finding employees, while 35% of them require at least college preparation. Of those, only 50% pay more than a living wage. Of the respondent employers who paid a living wage, only 19% provided health benefits, and 8% offered pensions (6).

The median employment income of the 13,930 income earners in Midland and Penetanguishene was \$31,200 and \$32,400 respectively in 2020 (7). In the rental market, the average monthly rent for an apartment in Midland was \$1,089 in October 2021, assuming an apartment could be found with a vacancy rate below 2% (8).

The local Employment Ontario Employment Service, which the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka runs, has seen a distinct decline in the number of job seekers looking for work — half that of pre-pandemic days. Of particular concern is that fewer youth in the area are looking for work. “Like everyone else right now, youth are increasingly able to secure employment without using the usual channels and tools. They don’t need an employment program. In some cases, they may not even need a resume. But the lack of youth using our services is concerning. We are seeing an ongoing reluctance to reengage with social life and the labour market coming out of the pandemic. The increase in mental health concerns is deeply troubling,” says Cristan Cooper, who manages youth employment programs at the YMCA in Midland.

“Then there is the fact that youth who are not in school and are looking for work...have vanished. Pre-pandemic, we’d have seen more than 70 youth per year taking a paid employment program, who ultimately found suitable jobs. In 2023, we’ll be lucky to see 30 youth.”

Solutions to the challenge of the labour shortage have included increases to wage rates, and increasingly, the offer of benefit packages, even in industries which traditionally have never done so, such as restaurants.

“It’s encouraging,” says Martina Wahl, Team Leader at the employment centre. “We’re seeing employers get really creative and much more open to reassessing job qualifications, and they’re more flexible with work schedules and other accommodations.”

Similarly, wages are indeed increasing nationally in response to worker demands and inflation, though the trend is decidedly in favour of those already on the higher end of the wage scales. “In October (2022), nearly two-thirds (64.3%) of employees with wages above \$40.00 per hour had received a raise in the previous year, compared with half (50.1%) of those with wages of \$20.00 or less per hour (population aged 15 to 69; not seasonally adjusted)(9). Better wages and benefits don’t always mean the jobs are easy to fill, however.

“Seasonal jobs are increasingly hard to fill,” says Wahl, “but so are what we consider good jobs – those featuring reasonable wages with prospects for long term employment. Workers are responding accordingly and leaving jobs



BRIGHT LIGHT

Test Batches Brewery, Midlander Jamie Tripp exuberantly peers around the former Bourgeois Ford Dealership. “After a long process, we have an agreement with the town to complete our dream of building a craft brewery and craft confectionary. The work on the building has begun and we look forward to welcoming guests in the spring of 2023.”





Photo courtesy of the YMCA Simcoe/Muskoka.

they may have held for years – for increased salaries, sure, but also to try something new. We’ve done more career coaching with established workers in the last two years than we have with any other group in the five years previous. People are reassessing priorities and making changes in their lives.

“Another trend we see reflected locally is the number of workers leaving the healthcare industry. At several points over the last 18 months, 10% of our job seekers have been healthcare workers – most looking for work in any other field. Pre-pandemic, it was rare for us to work with someone from the healthcare field at all,” says Wahl.

A recent Canadian Survey on Business Conditions (CSBC) conducted by Statistics Canada reveals that 27% of businesses say that they are in a better overall position in the second quarter of 2022 compared with 2019, particularly those in the professional, scientific, and technical services, manufacturing, and finance and insurance. Those in a worse position, 28% overall: accommodation and food services, transportation and warehousing, and arts, entertainment and recreation (11).

HCF SURVEY REVEALED (10)

- 14% of retiree respondents are still working in North Simcoe. That proportion of working will likely increase as inflation continues.
- 20% of survey respondents are struggling to make ends meet.
- 90% of survey respondents acknowledge that poverty is a significant issue in North Simcoe.

BRIGHT LIGHT



In Midland, Weber Manufacturing Technologies has made public their expansion of the Mastergrain door line with a new facility. The expansion is expected to create a minimum of 30 new jobs.

Optimism is predominant, however, when it comes to how businesses perceive their future outlook at the moment 70.4% are somewhat or very optimistic, 12.9% uncertain, and 16.7% either pessimistic or very pessimistic (12). In the current climate, that’s as optimistic as one could expect, and there is little doubt that a similar pattern would apply to North Simcoe.

To get more in-depth on this issue, and potential solutions, go to **Call to Action**.

“WITHOUT ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING, FINDING EMPLOYEES IS A REAL CHALLENGE.”

- DAVID SWEETNAM, GEORGIAN BAY FOREVER

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A FOUNDATION OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING: AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS IDENTIFIED AS A PRIORITY CONCERN

We have a critical problem of not having enough affordable housing for the residents of our North Simcoe region and for those who may wish to settle here to work and raise a family.



Persons who are homeless or must live in poor or unaffordable housing likely experience physical and mental health issues as a result. That is tragic; it demonstrates our community's inability to care properly for residents. It also means that we, as a community, shoulder the costs that are a consequence, such as funding temporary housing, or diverting justice and emergency services to deal with the homeless.

The lack of affordable housing also undermines the long-term economic health of our North Simcoe area. Young people may leave if they find they cannot thrive because they cannot earn enough to save for the future after paying for housing and other basic needs, while others simply will not relocate here. This is not good for local businesses and service organizations trying to attract workers, which is not good for the future of North Simcoe and area.

HOMELESSNESS: IT AFFECTS US ALL

We have residents among us who are living on the street or otherwise without stable shelter. This is a chronic problem and demonstrates a failure on our part to care properly for the most vulnerable in our community. No one chooses to be homeless.

"People who are homeless are not a distinct

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association: "Adequate, suitable and affordable housing contributes to our physical and mental well-being. It leads to increased personal safety and helps decrease stress, leading to improved sleep and diet. All of these factors result in better mental health outcomes. When housing is inadequate or unavailable, personal as well as community well-being can suffer"(1).

and separate population. In fact the line between being homeless and not being homeless is quite fluid ... Individuals and families who wind up homeless may not share much in common with each other, aside from the fact that they are extremely vulnerable, and lack adequate housing and income and the necessary supports to ensure they stay housed. The causes of homelessness reflect an intricate interplay between structural factors [such as lack of adequate income, access to affordable housing and health supports and/or the experience of discrimination], systems failures [such as poor transition from child welfare or from correctional, mental health and addiction facilities] and individual circumstances [such as traumatic events like losing a job, family problems like domestic violence, mental health and addiction challenges]. Homelessness is usually the result of the cumulative impact of a number of factors, rather than a single cause (2)."

More than 8 in 10 homeless persons in the North Simcoe area, experience chronic homelessness making them more at risk to develop a health problem, or have their problems get worse (5).

NORTH SIMCOE & AREA'S HOMELESSNESS (3)

- 67% lost their homes because of financial and housing issues
- 38% have interpersonal and family problems
- 88% have a mental health issue
- 64% have a substance abuse problem
- 73% have an illness, medical condition or physical disability
- 41% identify as Indigenous although they make up only 16.1% of the general population (4)

The cost and demand on public services to support and respond to homelessness, while necessary, mean that those resources are diverted from other areas of need.

Homelessness is a significant health care issue and continues to produce enormous costs to the economy. In 2014, the Mental Health Commission of Canada estimated that there were 150,000 to 300,000 homeless in Canada, which results in \$1.4 billion each year in costs to the health care, justice and social services systems (6).

A more recent study that looked at the public spending on homelessness found that larger Canadian cities spend anywhere between \$30,000 to \$59,000 annually per homeless person who has a mental illness (2016 dollars). These costs include emergency housing, substance abuse treatment, hospital care, and police and justice services (7).

While our local costs may or may not approach those in the study, service agencies and governments in North Simcoe region do expend public funds to deal with homelessness, scaled to the particularities of our geography and other circumstances.

“Affordable housing refers to permanent housing that costs less than 30% of total household income for low- and moderate-income Canadians. The notion of affordable housing not exceeding 30% of gross household income means that individuals and families are also able to afford food, clothing, taxes, transportation, and other necessities that promote health and well-being. This definition is an established norm and one accepted by the Government of Canada through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CHMC)” (8).

Of course, because public funds are finite, whatever resources we are able to direct towards homelessness, at the expense of other needs in our community, will never be enough.

The Guesthouse is an emergency shelter in Midland with a small, fixed capacity. They service four municipalities in North Simcoe and

report the need for shelter beds clearly exceed their capacity. Homeless persons who cannot access shelter beds will take refuge where they can find it and this chronic situation exacts a continuing toll on the broader community (9). The persistent presence of the homeless on our streets is a problem for us all. We must remember no one chooses to be homeless and solving the problem rests with the collective community.

The Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association recently started a wait list for their affordable housing project. They initially opened the list only to those trying to escape violent households. Within one month of the wait list being open, 34 households had applied; those households included 33 women and 48 children (10).

When women and children fleeing a violent home situation cannot be accommodated at emergency shelters, often the worst is the outcome. In our housing focus group, La Maison Rosewood Shelter in Midland reported that many women return to the abuser (11).

THE FUTURE OF OUR NORTH SIMCOE REGION DEPENDS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The need for affordable housing in North Simcoe cannot be over-emphasized.

“Affordable housing is an investment in health promotion and illness prevention. When a person has adequate housing they experience fewer health problems and are able to devote more of their income to feed and clothe themselves and their family (12).”

As well, having an adequate supply of affordable housing in our community helps ensure businesses and local organizations have the workers they need to run their enterprises.

The interrelationships among affordable housing, poverty and low paying jobs, and their impact on general health and well-being, are well known. As was observed in a 2013 Homeless Hub research paper:

WHAT NORTH SIMCOE AREA RESIDENTS ARE SAYING...(13)

“Most jobs available in this area do not pay enough for people to afford to live here in the current uncontrolled real estate ‘wild west’...”

“Real estate market is out of reach of most people.”

“Despite having a good income, I would be scared to need to find alternatives as there is little availability and poor affordability. Especially if wanting something of good quality.”

“A large segment of the Canadian population is struggling with poverty and income security (social assistance rates, low-income cut-offs and minimum wage), housing affordability (including vacancy rates, cost of housing and social housing wait lists) and food insecurity which puts them at increased risk of homelessness. A large number of families are making choices between paying rent and feeding their kids. Too many Canadians are living on the margins and are just one small disaster or missed paycheque away from homelessness (14).”

The reality of this analysis for our North Simcoe community comes into sharp focus when we look at the responses to our 2022 survey of residents. 75% of the respondents had doubts about being able to find alternative affordable housing if they did not have their current home (15).

We are living in difficult economic times. The need for affordable housing is even more pressing, as a November 2022 Canada-wide survey found:

...almost all Canadians (96 per cent) surveyed said their cost of living has increased this past year and four-in-five Canadians (78 per cent) are worried about having to spend less on food, savings, transportation costs, and/or debt payments to continue to afford their current housing (16).

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) says that housing is “affordable” if you pay less than 30% of your income for it. This leaves you enough money to pay for food, clothing, and other essentials (17).



BOARD MEMBERS OF THE GUESTHOUSE SERVE UP DINNER

Photo courtesy of The Guesthouse

For the North Simcoe region, 39.4% of renter households spend more than 30% of their income on housing, and 14.8% of owner households do so. 18.2% of the renter households live in subsidized housing (18). The wait time to get into subsidized housing in Midland and Penetanguishene is between 4.5 and 8 years (19).

A person earning the minimum wage of \$15.50 per hour (20) with a full-time job in Midland (based on a 40 hour work week), will pay about 44% of their wages on a rental. If they have a job that pays the current “living wage” of \$20.70 per hour (21), they will pay about 33% on rent.

Whether a North Simcoe area resident working full-time, earning the minimum wage, the working wage, or the median wage, what is the likelihood that they can live day-to-day, and save for a down payment and qualify for a mortgage for a house. Many are just getting by.

Our North Simcoe region is in the same boat as many other places. Everyone is dealing

- Median annual income of a North Simcoe area resident in 2020 - \$38,500 (22)
- Rent for a one bedroom apartment in Midland – well over \$1,000 per month (23)
- Rental vacancy in Midland – less than 2% (24)
- Average house price in Midland and Penetanguishene - about \$700,000 (25)

“THE TRUE MEASURE OF ANY SOCIETY IS SEEN IN HOW IT CARES FOR ITS MOST VULNERABLE MEMBERS.”

- MAHATMA GANDHI

with inflation and lack of affordable housing. It is important to appreciate the relationship between income which can be earned and the cost of housing in our community. If residents and young workers see that staying means they will likely do no better than “survive” into the future and not “thrive,” they will leave for a better situation. We all lose when talent leaves. Without wages that enable adequate housing, talent will not choose North Simcoe. Hope and the potential for a better future is everything.

“The many problems we experience today arise from the way our society has chosen to plan and build its housing. Any meaningful improvement will require structural change to our approach. Housing must become more of a public good and less a speculative asset. And like any major societal project, it begins with visionary leadership.”

- Gord McKay, former Mayor of Midland

To get more in-depth on this issue, and potential solutions, go to **Call to Action**.

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BRIGHT LIGHT

Shelter Now has announced 32 new Supportive Housing Units in Midland, providing affordable housing and support services. Collaboration with community partners will add social, recreational, and rehabilitation programs. Applications will open in the spring of 2023 (26).



Picture courtesy of Sharon Langfield & Peter Cox
THREE SISTERS GARDEN
 VETERAN’S PARK, WAUBAUSHENE



WITH GRATITUDE

We are so grateful for the support provided to us, grateful for the tireless work done by those on the front lines, and grateful for the leadership that will strategize a way to help this community move forward. We are grateful to the volunteers and donors who contribute to making North Simcoe a vibrant, resilient place to call home.

CONTRIBUTING ORGANIZATIONS

211

Community Reach
County of Simcoe
Georgian Bay Forever
Georgian Bay Hunters & Anglers
Georgian Bay Métis Council
Georgian Bay Native Friendship Center
Georgian Bay Native Women's Association
Georgian College
Guesthouse
Le Villageois de Lafontaine
Muskoka Watershed Council
North Simcoe Ontario Health Team
Nottawa Valley Conservation Authority
Ontario Federation of Agriculture
Rosewood Shelter
Severn Sound Environmental Association
Shelter Now
Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
Wendat, The Lorna Tomlinson Residence for Seniors
Wye Marsh

HELPED WITH DISTRIBUTION

Chigamik Community Health Centre
Lab X
Le Goût de Vivre
Midland Today
Township of Georgian Bay Library
Midland Library
Township of Tay Library
Penetanguishene Library
Rotary Club of Midland
Rotary Club of Penetanguishene
Town of Midland
Township of Tay
Township of Tiny
Southern Georgian Bay Chamber of Commerce
YMCA of Simcoe Muskoka

CALL TO ACTION

Huronia Community Foundation has been a champion for building social capital in North Simcoe for 23 years. The Foundation is committed to a resilient, caring and sharing community... Join us.

Learn More

Follow [this link](#) for additional information and potential strategies. Identify an issue in our region and educate yourself. HCF has the resources to help you.

Volunteer

The Pandemic has taken its toll, kept us isolated and separate. Now is the time to reconnect. See what part you can play in rebuilding a community where we can all live safely and abundantly together.

Donate

Ensure that some of your donation dollars go to local charities, either directly or through one of the [funds at HCF](#).

Be Kind

The last few years have been challenging for all of us. If everyone takes on small gestures, pays it forward, we can create a vibrant community for all.

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