

Vital Signs®

What is Vital Signs?

Hamilton's Vital Signs checks the pulse of our city. Under the guidance of a panel of community experts, it curates data in 10 key areas of community life into research you can read, providing an insight into Hamilton's overall vitality and identifying significant trends and issues that matter to all of us. Visit hamiltonvitalsigns.ca for expanded indicators, sources and links to original research.



Terry Cooke
President & CEO

A message from Hamilton Community Foundation

Hamilton's Vital Signs is a resource to help us understand our city over time; the more we understand, the better our effort to help it thrive.

This report is the latest in our Vital Signs series, and like each edition it points to existing gaps in quality of life among Hamiltonians — but now with a harsh focus on how the pandemic has widened those gaps. It shows starkly that income, employment conditions, education, locality, race and gender ultimately correlate with rates of COVID-19.



Leila Ryan, Chair
Vital Signs Advisory
Committee

Certainly, the pandemic is taking an unequal toll, but we must confront the difficult truth that COVID-19 did not create these systemic injustices, and its ultimate conclusion will not end them. Together we must continue the hard work against inequity and learn from the pandemic's lessons.

What can you do? While collective action necessarily looks different in these unusual times, we urge you to dig deeper into the issues and their root causes, to share your constructive thoughts and ideas through virtual discussions, and to use your voice for an equitable Hamilton.

Inequities will not disappear with the pandemic, but when COVID-19 is finally under control, let us maintain the urgency to act.

COVID-19 in Hamilton as of May 15, 2021

A total of 19,204 COVID-19 cases have been reported in Hamilton. Of these, 1,325 (6.9%) required hospitalization, and 374 (1.9%) resulted in death. Most cases have been among adults (62% were between ages 20-59); 98% of deaths are among people aged 60 and over.

Outbreaks: The City's Public Health Services has declared 430 outbreaks since March 2020. Of these, 117 (27%) have been in long-term care and retirement homes, 86 (20%) have been in workplaces, 70 (16%) in schools or child-care settings, 67 (16%) in shelters or supportive housing facilities, 41 (10%) in hospitals, and 11% in other locations.

Racialized populations and people living in low-income: While data is not available for the whole pandemic period, a survey of 992 COVID-19-positive Hamiltonians that was conducted between March 1, 2020 and August 31, 2020 found that visible minorities represented 51% of all COVID-19 cases, while making up only 19% of the population. The same survey found that Hamiltonians living in poverty accounted for 27% of COVID-19 cases, while representing only 19% of the population.

Vaccinations: Since COVID-19 vaccines started in the final weeks of last year, 232,462 doses have been administered via pharmacies and fixed-site, primary-care and mobile clinics. Currently, 45.1% of eligible Hamiltonians have had at least one vaccine dose. An analysis by The Hamilton Spectator based on data up to April 19, 2021 found people living in lower-income neighbourhoods were less likely to be vaccinated, while people in higher-income neighbourhoods had higher rates of vaccination.

What the findings show

Unprecedented change. From the biggest annual job loss on record, drastic changes in the way children learn, how we work and receive health care, patterns of immigration, and devastated arts, entertainment and food sectors, this past year has been unmatched in the pace and scale of change Hamiltonians have experienced.

An unequal burden. Racialized groups and people of colour have not only experienced much higher COVID-19 rates, but also higher unemployment and higher likelihood of working in one of the hardest-hit economic sectors. People of colour also reported feeling less safe and were the most common targets of harassment and hate crimes.

Deep social isolation effects. During the initial lockdown, seniors in long-term care homes suffered among the most visibly; however, isolation has resulted in poorer mental health across all age groups, especially youth. It also contributed to increased risks in families experiencing domestic violence.

Lessons about reducing income inequality. The federal Canada Emergency Response Benefits program increased disposable income for the poorest 20% of Hamiltonians and decreased income inequality generally. Although temporary, it decreased the number of people relying on social assistance.

Change beyond COVID-19. Last July was the hottest on record, underlining concerns about climate change. Much-anticipated air pollution reductions from decreased travel and work did not materialize. The ownership and rental housing market had record year-over-year price increases. The number of homicides and the number of opioid overdoses and deaths were high.

**HAMILTON
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ARTS AND CULTURE



The pandemic has hit arts and culture hard, especially those relying primarily on in-person attendance. The broader cultural sector, including film and media, fared somewhat better.

Employment in the arts

A local survey of nearly 100 Hamilton arts, entertainment and recreation organizations found the number of jobs fell to 1,214 from 2,328 between January and December 2020, a decrease of 48%.

Nationally, arts, entertainment and recreation has been one of the hardest-hit economic sectors — second only to airlines and travel. Between 2019 and 2020, job losses were 25%, compared to 5% across all industries. Job losses in performing arts totalled 41%, and artists who kept their jobs worked 36% fewer hours than in the prior year.

National research from Hill Strategies found that annual incomes for artists were not equitable across groups. Indigenous artists earned 32% less than non-Indigenous, racialized artists earned 28% less than non-racialized, and

women artists earned 18% less than men. The overall average income for artists was \$24,300.

Events and museum or gallery visits

The number of outdoor events on City of Hamilton properties plunged to 43 in 2020 from 447 in 2019. Previously, these events had been steadily growing: 302 in 2016, 337 in 2017, and 445 in 2018. Annual visits to City galleries and museums fell by 82% to 36,000 in 2020, from 205,000 in 2019.

Film permits and revenue

Film permits issued by the City of Hamilton dropped by 34%, to 524 in 2020 from 790 in 2019. Revenues from filmmaking in Hamilton fell less steeply, dropping 10% to \$53 million in 2020 from \$59 million in 2019. Given that all activity was shut down for four months (March to July 2020), the film industry fared better than most other parts of the sector.

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: [Library use](#)

BELONGING



Social isolation has increased dramatically, while immigration numbers and police-reported hate crimes decreased.

Social isolation

Provincial and regional polls show a sharp increase in the percentage of people who report feeling more isolated during the pandemic. The Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario found 57% of respondents felt more isolated, 47% wished they had someone to talk to, and 36% reported being often, very often or almost always lonely. Severe visiting restrictions on seniors, especially those in long-term care or retirement homes, included a total shutdown from April to June 2020, which the Canadian Medical Association Journal found reduced direct care and overall well-being, and increased social isolation.

Immigration

Hamilton relies on immigration for most of its population growth. Immigration has accounted for about two-thirds of local growth in recent years, and was expected to increase,

with higher immigration targets for the next three years. Pandemic-related border closures caused 2020 immigration to Canada to drop by 46% from 2019. Immigration to Hamilton had a less severe drop of 33% over the same period with 2,170 immigrants arriving here, down from 3,240 in 2019.

Police-reported hate crimes

In 2020, the number of police-reported hate crimes and incidents fell to 80 from 92 in 2019, a decrease of 13.2%. Racial bias and religious bias were the most common causes of the hate incidents. Members of the Black community were targeted in 33 of the 38 racial bias incidents; members of the Jewish community were targeted in 30 of the 31 religious incidents. There were five incidents targeting people from Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities. Because many experiences of discrimination and harassment are not reported to the police, a coalition of community organizations is exploring additional ways to measure these incidents.

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: [Sense of belonging](#)

ECONOMY AND WORK



The pandemic's effect on nearly all workers and sectors has been dramatic. Women, young adults, racialized and Indigenous workers experienced the most profound impact.

Unemployment rate

Hamilton's unemployment rate in February 2021 was 7.0%, vastly improved over 12.4% in April 2020, but higher than the 4.3% pre-pandemic rate. Hamiltonians ages 15 to 24 had much higher unemployment rates over the last year, peaking at 33% for women and 28% for men in July 2020, before returning to 12.0% overall in February 2021. More women than men left the labour force entirely during the pandemic; women's participation rates dropped to 59.5% in September 2020 from 63.5% pre-pandemic, while for men, rates remained consistent (68.5%) over that period.

Employment status for Indigenous and racialized populations

In August 2020 (the most recent information available), Indigenous people living off reserve in Ontario had higher unemployment rates than non-Indigenous people

(16.8% compared to 11.2%) and lower rates of participation in the labour force (52% compared to 58%). In January 2021, Ontario labour force participants with racialized backgrounds (Southeast Asian 20.1%, Latin American 16.6%, Black 16.4%, Chinese 11%) had higher unemployment rates than non-racialized groups (9.3%). Indigenous and racialized people were also more likely to work in sectors that experienced the most job losses.

Number of jobs by sector

In Hamilton, a survey of approximately 1,500 local businesses reported the pandemic's significant impact on all economic sectors. It identified total job losses of 14.5% (8,000 of 54,000 jobs) with accommodation/food services and arts/recreation both reporting job losses of over 50%. Some 80% of businesses had revenue decreases in 2020; 25% reported losses of over 50% compared with the prior year. These trends were similar across Ontario, where 355,000 jobs were lost in 2020, the biggest annual job loss on record.

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: [Building permits](#)
• [Business licenses](#)

ENVIRONMENT



Air pollution measures and waste diversion rates remained steady during the pandemic, while July temperatures were the hottest in over 60 years.

Air pollution

Recent research examined pandemic trends among eight southwestern Ontario cities for four common pollutants: nitrogen dioxide, fine particulate matter, carbon monoxide and ground level ozone. It found that Hamilton pollutant levels did not change, with the exception of lower carbon monoxide in April 2020. The continuation of Hamilton's industrial sector as an essential service, along with pollutants from US sources, were suggested as possible explanations. Several other Ontario cities did experience drops in pollutants due to lower traffic and industrial activity.

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: [Percentage days beaches open](#)
• [Tree canopy coverage](#)

Climate change, July temperatures

An outcome of climate change is higher average temperatures. With an average temperature of 23.5 C, July 2020 was Hamilton's hottest in over 60 years. Moreover, July temperatures from 2016-2020 were the highest of any five-year period since 1960. Global trends are similar: NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies confirms that the last seven years have been the warmest globally.

Waste diversion

The amount of waste being diverted from landfills through green bin, blue box and leaf/yard waste programs stayed steady over the past year at 40%. This amount is an improvement from 2018 when only 34.3% of waste was diverted, but a drop from 2010-2012 when 49% of waste was diverted. Hamilton's waste diversion target is 65%.

GETTING AROUND



The pandemic's dramatic effects: fewer commuters and public transit use, and a renewed focus on alternatives like cycling.

Getting to work

The 2016 census showed that 83% of Hamiltonians used a car to get to work, slightly higher than the 79% provincial average. In June 2021, provincial data from Google Mobility showed a 62% drop in travel to and from work from the prior year. Statistics Canada found working from home depends greatly on sector: professional, scientific and technical services has 80% "telework capacity" and has exceeded its pre-pandemic employment levels; food and accommodation has a 5% telework capacity and continues to be 30% below pre-pandemic employment levels. National research has found the ability to work from home is not equal: it correlates with income level, gender, educational level and racial background.

HSR ridership

HSR ridership fell 46% to 11.7 million rides in 2020 from 21.6 million rides in 2019. This decrease is not as dramatic as

in some cities: public transit systems' ridership initially fell by 90% in Toronto and Ottawa, and had returned to only 30% pre-pandemic levels by November. London's ridership fell by 75% and had returned to 40% of pre-pandemic levels in November. Kitchener-Waterloo, York Region, and Mississauga had decreases similar to Hamilton.

Kilometres of bike lanes

In 2020, 16 cycling projects were installed, including 11 km of new bicycle lanes and paved shoulders, improvements to five km of existing lanes, and five km of new multi-use trails. The centrepiece was the completion of the Keddy Access Trail along the Claremont Access. Bicycle ridership on city lanes remained consistent throughout the pandemic, in contrast to other transportation modes.

Cycling promotion is a key component of the City's COVID-19 Recovery Phase Mobility Plan. Some 20 km of additional bicycle lanes and paths are planned for 2021, including a protected Victoria Avenue path to link Hamilton General Hospital, the Cannon Street Cycle Path, and the Keddy Access Trail.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Health care delivery shifted from in-office to virtual visits, self-reported mental health declined, and opioid overdose and deaths remained at historically high levels.

Transition to virtual

The shift from in-office to virtual care for health care delivery has been drastic. In March 2021, Hamilton's primary care physicians reported that over 70% of their visits are now carried out online. Provincial research showed total primary care visits dropped by 28% between March and July 2020 compared to 2019, with in-office visits dropping by 80%, and virtual visits comprising 71% of all appointments.

Mental health

National research from Statistics Canada found that the percentage of Canadians who reported excellent or very good mental health declined significantly, to 55% in July 2020 compared with 68% pre-pandemic. The drop was most pronounced for people aged 16 to 34. Additional research

during the pandemic showed health care workers, racialized groups and people who are members of Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities were less likely than the general population to report excellent or good mental health.

Opioid overdoses and deaths

Overdoses and deaths caused by opioid use continued at high levels throughout the pandemic. For the first 11 months of 2020, there were 113 deaths in Hamilton. There were 105 deaths in 2019 and 123 in 2018. These deaths are drastically higher than historical numbers: the average number of deaths between 2008 and 2016 was fewer than 40 annually.

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: Delays in cancer screening and treatment

HOUSING



Average home sale prices and rents continued to increase rapidly, while the pandemic led to significant challenges for people seeking emergency shelter.

Detached home prices

Hamilton's average house price in March 2021 was \$804,223, up 32% from \$607,939 in March 2020. This unprecedented rise was due to increased demand, reduced supply and low interest rates: in March 2021, the number of listings was 650 compared to 1,036 in March 2020. The most expensive areas were Flamborough and Ancaster, each with average prices over \$1 million. The most affordable homes were in Hamilton Centre where the average sale price was \$605,000, an increase of 33% from the prior year.

Two-bedroom apartment rents

The average rent for all two-bedroom units in Hamilton (including both rented and vacant units), rose 5% to \$1,184 in October 2020, up from \$1,130 in October 2019. Rents for vacant (available to rent) two-bedroom units jumped 25% between March 2020 and March 2021 to an average cost of \$2,057 from \$1,639. Over the past decade, Hamilton rents

have risen 49%, more than double the increase in the cost of living.

Rents have increased in all areas of the city and across all unit types, with Ancaster, Dundas and the city core being the most expensive.

Number of people seeking emergency shelter

The number of people who used an emergency shelter at some point remained steady between 2017 and 2019 at approximately 2,900 people. While reliable totals are not available for 2020, the pandemic forced the opening of alternative facilities for anyone who was COVID-19-positive and homeless. Many people stayed in tents or encampments instead of using emergency shelters.

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: Social housing waitlist
• **Number of housing starts**

LEARNING



One-quarter of elementary students enrolled in virtual-only learning. University enrollment increased, while the number of students in junior and senior kindergarten, secondary school co-op placements, and college programs fell.

Elementary students: virtual only

The number of elementary students enrolled in the Remote Day School (virtual-only learning) was 11,896 out of 47,531, a rate of 25%. This was much higher than the rate for secondary students, where the rate of virtual-only learning was below 1%.

Kindergarten enrollment

The number of students enrolled in senior kindergarten dropped by 3.2%, to 5,253 in 2020-21 from 5,429 in 2019-20. The number of students enrolled in junior kindergarten declined by 15% over the same time period to 4,569 students in 2020-21 from 5,537 the prior year.

Post-secondary enrollment

The number of full-time students enrolled at McMaster University increased by 7% in fall 2020 to 30,171, from 28,209 in fall 2019. Redeemer University also reported a 13.5% increase in total enrollment to 896 students in 2020, up from 789 in 2019. The number of full-time students enrolled at Mohawk College in fall 2020 decreased to 11,643 from 13,033 in 2019, a drop of 10.7%.

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: Secondary student co-op enrollment

LOW INCOME



COVID-19 rates were higher in neighbourhoods with higher rates of poverty and among residents who are racialized. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was a major factor in closing the gap between the richest and poorest Canadians.

Neighbourhood COVID-19 rates

The rate of COVID-19 cases in the poorest 20% of Hamilton's neighbourhoods (179 per 100,000 people) was nearly double that in the richest 20% of neighbourhoods (99 per 100,000 people). Similarly, the 20% of neighbourhoods with the highest proportion of racialized residents had more than double the rates of COVID-19 cases (196 per 100,000 people) than the 20% of neighbourhoods with the lowest percentages of racialized residents (81 per 100,000).

Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)

A monthly average of 57,500 Hamiltonians received CERB payments of approximately \$2,000 per month. In the program's first month, 101,300 Hamiltonians (18%) received

the benefit, with this number falling gradually to 33,700 individuals (6%) in its seventh and final month. CERB varied substantially by neighbourhood for the first month; uptake was as much as 30% of residents in higher poverty neighbourhoods, compared to 16% in wealthier neighbourhoods.

Income change

According to Statistics Canada national research, from January to September 2020, disposable income for the poorest 20% of Canadians improved by 37%. This increase was attributed to temporary emergency benefit programs like the CERB and others, which outpaced the loss of wages and salaries for many households. In 2020, these programs led to closing the gap between the poorest 20% of Canadian households (who now hold 7.2% of all disposable income, up from 6.1% one year ago) and the richest 20% of Canadians (who now hold 38% of all disposable income, down from 40% one year ago).

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: Ontario Works caseload and benefit levels

SAFETY



Most types of police-reported crime fell during the pandemic, but domestic violence and reports of harassment and discrimination increased.

Overall crime rates

The rate of police-reported crimes dropped substantially during the initial lockdown period of March to June 2020. Notable decreases included 28% in assaults, 22% in impaired driving, 19% in auto thefts and 12% in weapons offences. While most types of crime decreased during the pandemic, there was a 130% increase in commercial break-ins compared to pre-pandemic levels, and 17 homicides in Hamilton in 2020, the highest number in over 30 years.

Perceptions of safety

National research from Statistics Canada reported on perceptions of safety since the onset of COVID-19. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, members of Asian and South Asian communities reported a three-fold increase in discriminatory harassment or attacks. Other visible minority groups (including Black, Arab, and Latin American) also reported a two-fold increase in discriminatory harassment or attacks since the onset of COVID-19. A local survey found that while most

members of Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities feel safe in Hamilton's public places, over 40% felt less safe in religious spaces and settings. People who were transgender and/or racialized tended to feel less safe than non-transgender and non-racialized respondents in all spaces.

Domestic and intimate partner violence

Between April and December 2020, calls to Canada's Assaulted Women's Hotline almost doubled to 71,650, compared with 36,360 for the same period in 2019. Local emergency shelters echoed the findings from *Shelter Voices*, a national survey of women's shelters and emergency services. It found the pandemic created substantial challenges due to women's concern about COVID-19 infection in shelters and increased risks of violence because partners were home more often. Emergency calls to Hamilton Police Services related to domestic abuse increased 4.4% in 2020 when compared with 2019.

On hamiltonvitalsigns.ca: Road, cycling and pedestrian safety

About Hamilton Community Foundation

Hamilton Community Foundation has been driving positive change in Hamilton since 1954. We do this by:

- Helping people give in a way that has meaning to them and impact in the community
- Providing grants and financing to a wide range of charitable organizations and initiatives
- Bringing people together to address priority issues that affect Hamiltonians.

We'd love to hear your feedback on this report.

Please visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VitalSigns2021>

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Please join us

Hear more about the "why" behind the "what" in Hamilton's Vital Signs with a panel of experts, **Thursday, June 3, 2:30 – 4:00 p.m.** on Cable 14 or by livestreaming cable14now.com.

Join the Q&A

Before or during the show you can ask questions

- via Twitter: **Use #HamiltonVitalSigns**

- via email to VitalSigns@HamiltonCommunityFoundation.ca



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 co-ordinated nationally by Community Foundations of Canada.

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