

HAMILTON'S VitalSigns®

Hamilton's Vital Signs

A citizens' report from Hamilton Community Foundation on 10 areas that contribute to the city's quality of life

Hamilton's Vital Signs is a new report that looks at the vitality of our city, identifies significant trends and is intended to stimulate citizen awareness, discussion, and action. It's part of a national initiative from Community Foundations of Canada; Hamilton is one of 16 Canadian cities releasing a local Vital Signs report today.

As a starting point to the discussion, we asked the community to share their perception on the 10 quality of life aspects presented in Vital Signs. The "stoplight" symbols that accompany each aspect provide insight into the perspectives of more than 1,000 citizens who responded to an online and telephone survey, conducted by Leger Marketing. That level of participation already tells us that Hamiltonians are ripe for the conversation.

Through the Vital Signs survey, citizens gave their opinion, based both on their own first-hand experience and a brief overview of the data, on each aspect using these descriptions:



Green – I believe we are moving in the right direction;

Yellow – I am concerned, or

Red – this issue is unacceptable.

We offer these opinions as a kickoff to community conversation. What do Hamiltonians think and feel about where they live? How do those opinions compare with your own? How much reflects what the facts and the trends are saying, and how much reflects day-to-day experience, or an exchange in the coffee shop? What can each of us learn, and how can we use that information both to change our own behaviour, and advocate for change in the broader community?

The issues presented in Vital Signs are complex. This report and the opinions are simply a jumping off point that we hope will inspire you to learn more about the underlying issues, the progress we are making as a community, where we need to go next and what each of us can do. We hope it will encourage dialogue, connections and action. If your interest is piqued by this report, we encourage you to go to hamiltonvitalsigns.ca for more context and an in-depth perspective. You can also tune in to weekly Vital Signs segments on Cable 14's *For the Record*, Mondays beginning November 1.

What do you think about what you have read? Send us a note: vitalsigns@hcf.on.ca.



**HAMILTON
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For Hamilton, For Ever

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A Message from Hamilton Community Foundation

This Vital Signs report captures a snapshot of Hamilton's quality of life. It shows a good city, holding its own with other cities across the province. Public safety is improving. Our environmental footprint is shrinking. Hamiltonians are creating and enjoying a burgeoning arts and cultural community.

That's the picture at first glance. But look a little closer, dig a little deeper into the data. Under the surface, you discover two cities that share the same urban boundary but little else. One city is an archipelago of affluent neighbourhoods with healthy, well-educated residents enjoying an enviable quality of life. The other city concentrates shocking levels of poverty, curtailed education, high unemployment and ill health into poor neighbourhoods that might as well be on a different planet.

Vital Signs tells us that while Hamilton broadly tracks the provincial average for the various issues we present – our 7.7% unemployment rate, our 6.1% rate of low birthweight babies, our 84% high school completion rate – that average masks the vastly different realities of our two cities.

For example, poverty rates in Hamilton neighbourhoods range from less than 3% to over 40%. Similarly, families in Hamilton's five highest-income neighbourhoods had median incomes over three times higher than those in the five lowest-income neighbourhoods. The difference to a family between \$110,000 a year and \$33,000 a year is the difference between a high standard of living and a constant struggle.

Education levels also segregate our two cities. The proportion of 20- to 24-year-olds who have not completed high school ranges by neighbourhood, from zero to over 65%. The difference between our two cities extends to health as well. Vital Signs shows that the rate of low birthweight babies is twice as high in some neighbourhoods as it is in others.

Concentrated poverty is devastating to the communities that suffer it, but it surely harms our city as a whole. It inevitably spreads out and undermines economic growth, property values, public health and educational outcomes across entire regions. Understanding and addressing the economic segregation that cleaves our city is the moral imperative of our generation. It calls us to do more to meet the complex challenges of concentrated poverty. It calls us as citizens to

"We need more citizens engaged and working to build community, social and economic capital."

What the Findings Show

These recurring themes underlie the data you'll read in this report:

- **Dramatic disparities between neighbourhoods.** Where information was available by neighbourhood, there are profound and inter-related disparities. Housing, the gap between rich and poor, health, learning, safety, and voter turnout vary widely depending on where you live.
- **Impact of a shifting economy on future prosperity.** The findings reflect the shift of Hamilton's economy from a manufacturing base and the need to prepare our workforce. Currently, Hamiltonians are less educated than the provincial average, and there is a lower percentage of people in the labour force. School readiness is slightly below the provincial average and standardized test performance varies widely by school.
- **Citizens, organizations and government can make a difference.** The results show that people can have a significant impact on progress. With strong leadership from local government and citizens, water use, and waste diversion improved remarkably, and reductions in some types of air pollutants showed improvement. Fewer seniors lived in poverty in 2006 than in 2001, and we have found strategies to reduce homelessness among men in Hamilton.
- **Trends beyond borders.** Hamilton is unique in many ways, but is also consistent with, and influenced by, trends across the province, country and beyond. The city reflects the drop in violent crime and property crime rates which have fallen



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President & CEO, HCF



Dr. Lindsey George
Board Chair, HCF

become more engaged in finding solutions and building community.

The good news is that Vital Signs provides clear statistical evidence that, in specific instances, we're moving in the right direction. Poverty among senior citizens fell from 24% to 17% between the last two census periods. Our environmental record is also improving. Overall water consumption dropped by over 50% between 1993 and 2009, and waste diversion from landfills rose from 17% in 2000 to almost 50% in 2008.

Hamilton's "Transitions to Homes" program has successfully moved hundreds of chronically homeless men into stable housing. At the same time, Canada's Vibrant Communities network has recognized the Poverty Roundtable as one of the country's leading examples of transformational change.

But we need to do more. We need more citizens getting engaged, working to build community and investing in neighbourhood revitalization so we can build the social and economic capital that will restore our city. Tackling poverty and neighbourhood disparity has been a strategic focus of the Foundation's work since 2002. The themes you see summarized below, reinforced by Vital Signs data, confirm that HCF's work to tackle poverty, strengthen neighbourhoods, promote collaboration and engage citizens is vital to Hamilton's future.

As you dig below the surface of this snapshot, dig deeper as well into your store of compassion, outrage and action. Together, we can make powerful changes. Through a range of actions from individual behaviour change to policy change, Hamiltonians can and will continue to make a difference.

across North America. We felt the effects of the global recession in rising unemployment numbers and social assistance cases, while the causes were not under local control.

- **Poverty affects different people differently.** Poverty has an impact beyond the issue of the gap between rich and poor. Low birthweight, obesity, smoking, and a lack of physical activity are all more common in lower socio-economic households. Current challenges in the rental housing market tend to be caused by a lack of income to pay for rent, rather than a shortage of available apartments.
- There are also extreme differences in poverty and employment rates, housing affordability, and education levels between sub-populations, such as recent immigrants, single parent families, Aboriginal people and women.
- **The challenge and opportunity of immigration.** *Vital Signs* indicates that immigration is likely to be one of the primary sources of Hamilton's future population growth. Recent immigrants tend to be well educated and contribute to Hamilton's vibrant and creative city aspirations – well known author and scholar Richard Florida uses diversity as a key indicator for new business attraction and economic development. The challenge: fewer skilled immigrants are coming to Hamilton than to other major Ontario cities. Recent immigrants face higher unemployment rates than do non-immigrants.