

10 Overall Opportunities Suggested for Action

Ten themes for Niagara-wide action to build a stronger future emerged from the 2014 report:

1. **Leverage data and knowledge as resources for predictive intelligence** – Advance the framework being developed by the Data and Knowledge Niagara working group, to describe the Niagara-wide landscape for collecting, accessing and sharing data and knowledge. Collectively maximize these tools to support focused decision-making for a stronger future.
2. **Build on Shared Value and inter-Sectoral linkages to gain an understanding of what Measuring Impact means in the Niagara context** – Advance a proactive, upstream systems approach to investing in the people of Niagara so that all people have equal opportunities to achieve wellbeing.
3. **Increase inclusive cross-Sectoral pathways of communication and data-sharing** – Weaving of connections among diverse players, and related information-sharing across the 12 Living in Niagara Sectors is essential to building actionable strategies for measurable impact.
4. **Describe and acknowledge the for-social-profit sector's role in Niagara's economy** – This sector contributes significantly to Niagara's economy and quality of life. Thus, describing and quantifying its impact is an essential element in planning for economic development.
5. **Strengthen our ability to identify socio-economic indicators that are precursors to emerging data** – Further develop mechanisms for real-time identification of socio-economic trends in Niagara, to help us focus our planning.
6. **View poverty as a complex entity requiring complex solutions** – Building solutions begins with trusted partnerships that lead to data-sharing. When valuable data in one Sector is coupled with data from another, it creates a deeper understanding of complexity, and provides opportunities for analysis of actual root causes contributing to the situation.
7. **Gather information to understand Quality of Jobs in Niagara** – Aligning, sharing and meshing cross-Sectoral data will strengthen our ability to analyze and address effects of underemployment on the people and economy in Niagara.
8. **Expand the capacity and scope of Knowledge Exchange for Niagara** – Create education tools to enable people in Niagara to understand and develop skills in the use of Knowledge Exchange for the purpose of shared inter-Sectoral learning, development of new partnerships, and focused planning based on relevant, reliable information.
9. **Leverage the provincial focus on health system integration and individual and family/support centered care** - This will lead to enhanced quality of service across the health and social service continuum. Putting the client and his or her family/supports first is an economic driver that leads to innovation, and focused research.
10. **Support Implementation of the Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter** - Increase public knowledge about the handling of persons in mental health crisis. Pay attention to opportunities for shared learning across the health and human services continuum in Niagara.

57 Suggested Action Steps Across the 12 Living in Niagara Sectors

Arts, Culture and Heritage 2014

- Continue to support and encourage the arts as an essential part of the education process for learners of all ages in Niagara.
- Broaden and deepen our collective understanding of the socio-economic contribution of the overall Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector in Niagara, and continue to strengthen opportunities for players within this Sector to collectively describe, articulate and reflect the impact of their work and presence on the vibrancy of Niagara.
- Preserve, maintain and promote access to and interpretation of the remnants of the first three versions of the Welland Canal. Create opportunities to tell our collective stories of the Welland Canal in our community.
- Increase the flow of mutually beneficial information across the Niagara-wide Arts, Culture and Heritage Sector and beyond, to enable: on-going, timely and easy access to data and reports to inform collective branding; complementary product development and cross-promotion that achieves impact; and intentional gathering and sharing of knowledge and data to support integrated planning.

Belonging, Volunteering, Giving and Leadership 2014

- Identify opportunities to leverage and weave together initiatives around Age-Friendly, and youth engagement in Niagara, to strengthen sharing of wisdom, encouragement and empowering social connections for people of all ages. Engaging young people in community leadership, volunteerism, philanthropy, and promoting their interest in fulfilling board and governance roles is good for Niagara.
- Work together to increase the profile of community-built information assets, such as 211 Niagara, and the Niagara Knowledge Exchange.
- Raise awareness about opportunities for intentional volunteer recruitment, to create a diverse pool of volunteers more reflective of the Niagara community at large. Develop strategies to encourage broader and deeper volunteer participation.
- Expand the number of clinic host sites in Niagara for the CRA Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, to meet growing demand.
- Raise awareness among agencies of the opportunity to post needs for donated goods on the Niagara Region Donations of Goods Portal, to make it easier for those looking to donate. In 2013 the 3,776 record views on the portal outweighed the total of 39 specific donation opportunities.
- Encourage increased participation among Niagara voters in federal, provincial and municipal elections.

Crime, Safety and Security 2014

- Provide focused specialized training for first-line workers in areas such as mental health, domestic violence, and financial abuse of the elderly.
- Strengthen our understanding of how crimes, crime rates, and incidence of child abuse and domestic violence in Niagara relate to poverty and its root causes, homelessness, and overall economic conditions.
- Leverage the work of the community in implementing the Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter to gather best practice resources to inform Police interactions with people struggling with mental health problems, in the Niagara context.
- Continue to gather information about emerging issues, including elder abuse, youth justice and youth coming in contact with the legal system.

Economic Development, Poverty and Prosperity 2014

- Continue to strengthen sharing of knowledge about best business practice, along with focused supports for Niagara's core of small to medium-size enterprises.
- Deepen our understanding of shared value between business, economic development and for-social-profit players in Niagara, to inform a collective approach to socio-economic planning.
- Pay attention to the root causes of underemployment in Niagara, and its impact on our people and economy.
- Advance the Data and Knowledge Niagara framework, to expand Niagara's capacity to leverage data resources for predictive intelligence.
- Support work being done to advance a systems approach to investing in the people of Niagara, to proactively address root causes of poverty through a preventive, upstream investment approach.

Environment 2014

- Engage diverse players in Niagara to collaboratively explore practical action steps related to the Environment Sector of this report.
- Leverage knowledge we have gathered about effects of climate change in the Niagara context, to drive community action toward a more resilient Niagara.
- Increase interconnectivity between knowledge transfer systems such as the Niagara Knowledge Exchange and the Crowdsourcing Sustainability tool.
- Enhance communication pathways to identify and tell stories of environmental action in Niagara, such as the Water Keepers and urban forest initiatives. This will help to raise awareness among citizens about practical ways they can take action, such as conserving water and energy, protecting water quality and contributing to biodiversity.
- Identify, describe and strengthen intersects between the Environment Sector and other Sectors, to increase our quality of life. For example, increased understanding of the relationship between Environment and Health and Wellness could inform the Implementation Phase of the Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter and the Healthy Kids Challenge initiative.

Health and Wellness 2014

- Support implementation of the Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter.
- Utilize the Niagara Knowledge Exchange tool to engage partners in upstream health planning, support shared learning about best practice, and gather relevant, reliable Niagara-focused evidence, information and knowledge.
- Leverage the Health Quality Ontario focus on the importance of health system integration, to enhance quality of services across the continuum.
- Focus on addressing root causes of poverty and health-related issues of marginalized and vulnerable populations, by supporting a systems approach to investing in the people of Niagara.

Housing and Shelter 2014

- Support the implementation of the Niagara Region 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Action Plan (HHAP) through inter-agency collaboration and development of a single, common monitoring report to measure a key cross section of housing-related indicators over time.
- Pay attention to key contributing factors affecting homelessness in Niagara, such as:
 - The mounting effect of no new build of affordable housing being done in Niagara since the 1990's, and provincial funding levels for housing and homelessness remaining the same for several years is (i) forcing people living in poverty to reside in substandard housing and (ii) not providing suitable entry points into housing for people who are living outside.
 - The importance of providing rent supplements and affordable transitional housing to help stabilize individuals and communities in which they live.
 - The lack of new housing being built and the conditions of already substandard housing are worsening where homeless or marginalized individuals live.
 - The landlords' role in addressing issues such as fixing substandard housing
 - Supporting prevention's role in avoiding housing loss
 - Supported and supportive housing as a means for people requiring assistance to live independently
- Explore potential for implementing the federal concept of 'Housing First' in the Niagara context by surveying culture orientation/philosophy of local organizations, analyzing availability of suitable housing, and reviewing models such as the Mental Health Commission of Canada At Home/Chez Soi research completed in 5 cities.
- Utilize our common understanding of what affordable housing means as a benchmark to monitor progress of the number of affordable housing new starts in Niagara.
- Work with local municipalities to track average cost of utilities in Niagara, an underlying measure of rent costs, and an indicator of cost of living.

Learning and Education 2014

- While progress is being made, Niagara would be strengthened by increased levels of completion of post-secondary education.
- Continue to support targeted initiatives to strengthen learning opportunities in identified neighbourhoods in Niagara.
- Leverage Niagara-wide partners' work in the implementation phase of the Niagara Mental Health and Addictions Charter, to help strengthen the landscape for student mental wellness in Niagara.
- Strengthen cross-Sectoral communication and knowledge-sharing pathways, to help focus our planning together for a stronger work and employment landscape in Niagara.
- Continue to identify resources to support children and families who do not have access to the internet and related technology in the home.
- Invest effort into increasing awareness of all learning and educational options for adults in Niagara, especially those that are not traditional, institutional options.

People Getting Started 2014

- Advance the focus on parental engagement in the Niagara context, so that parents and families feel respected, connected and supported in a community that honours their diversity.
- Continue to advocate for adequate child care funding to ensure the Niagara-wide community is not impacted by a necessity for waitlists for subsidized child care.
- Increase efforts to attract immigrants to settle in Niagara, to enrich the cultural mix in our communities, help offset Niagara's low population growth rates and strengthen Niagara's inherent links with international markets. Gain a better understanding of Secondary Immigration trends of newcomers with jobs based in Toronto, who find GTA cost of living prohibitive and may choose to live in Niagara and commute.
- Develop a broadened understanding of the effects on, and opportunities for Niagara arising from the increasing numbers of international students of all ages studying in our region.

Recreation & Sports 2014

- Gather comprehensive evidence on the current and potential economic impact of sport tourism for Niagara. This information will support a sport hosting strategy that achieves impact by leveraging strengthened partnerships within Niagara and globally.
- Inventory existing sports facilities in Niagara, as a basis for strategic planning to focus on opportunities for attracting: athletes training at the national level; new settlement; and new investment in our region.
- Explore research done at Brock University on Bouldering within the Niagara Glen as a model of integrating and providing access to world-class rock climbing within Niagara.
- Deepen our understanding of barriers, including accessibility, financial and transportation concerns that limit people's participation in recreation and sports.

Transportation and Mobility 2014

- Increase our understanding of how students, tourists and people going to work utilize transit in Niagara, as important context for transit's value to the region.
- Advocate for increased prioritization and funding of transit initiatives across the Region by local municipalities in partnership with the Regional Municipality of Niagara, to create a seamless and viable regional transit service. Further encourage the provincial government to continue to increase funding outside the GTA for transit capital and operating enhancements to meet emerging AODA legislation and the needs and expectations of riders across Niagara.
- Continue to focus on the economic and quality of life benefits for Niagara of being a "cyclist/biking friendly" community.
- Apply a healthy community lens in planning to develop walkable, transit supportive and universally accessible communities for all individuals' enjoyment and participation.
- Support business model research being completed by the 'Getting There' working group, to build a practical strategy for centrally-dispatched access to health and human services for Niagara's most vulnerable people.

Work and Employment 2014

- Create opportunities for training of Niagara workers who are seasonally laid off, to build capacity for off-season employment.
- Address root causes of: underemployment of many youth and new graduates in Niagara; and employment rates for people between the ages of 15 and 24 in Niagara being 3.5% lower relative to Ontario and Canada.
- Continue to strengthen cross-Sectoral communication and knowledge-sharing pathways, to help focus our planning together for a stronger work and employment landscape in Niagara.
- Gather information to better understand the quality of jobs available in Niagara and how that relates to underemployment of our people and the strength of our economy.
- Explore models that allow workers low cost/no cost options to upgrade skills related to emerging markets.