

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What is the ultimate purpose of a community, a province, or a country? Does it exist only for the sake of commerce and economy? Or is it founded on a broader vision of a place where families and communities can prosper?

In preparing a profile of people's quality of life, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) focuses on those things that Canadians have identified as being most important to them – thriving and vital communities; opportunities for lifelong learning and to engage in the democratic process; a sustainable environment; good health; economic security; leisure and cultural opportunities; and work-life balance. The interplay of these domains and the ways in which they interact and reinforce one another, define and influence our overall wellbeing as individuals and communities.

In this report, indicators of wellbeing for the eight domains of the CIW have been gathered from the most recently available national and provincial sources, and combined with measures from local sources to provide a profile of Oxford County and its residents. This portrait of wellbeing provides a population-level view of the Region and reflects its position relative to other regions – the West Region of Ontario, the province overall, and Canada. By doing so, we see where Oxford County is doing well and where it could be doing better.

Overall, here are some of the main findings from this profile of wellbeing in Oxford County:

-  **DEMOGRAPHICALLY** – Oxford County is both younger and older than other regions in the province – it has higher percentages of residents who are 0 to 17 years old and 55 years of age and older. It is also one of the least ethnically diverse regions in the province.
-  **MORE TIGHT KNIT COMMUNITIES** – residents have a higher sense of belonging to their community, greater feelings of safety, and experience less discrimination than elsewhere in Ontario, even though they volunteer somewhat less and report having fewer close friends.
-  **LOCAL CHALLENGE FOR DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT** – like elsewhere across Canada, Oxford residents turned out in higher numbers for federal and provincial elections, but did not show up for the most recent municipal elections in as great number. However, they did elect more women to Oxford County Council than in many other municipalities.
-  **LOWER MARKS FOR EDUCATION** – Oxford County has lower rates of both high school graduation and people with a university degree, and less access to childcare. However, the libraries offer more literacy and learning programs for children and more programs on careers and job advice for adults.
-  **PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS** – Oxford County residents enjoy higher air and water quality than those living in many other parts of Ontario, and they are diverting much more waste through recycling programs than elsewhere across the province.
-  **POSITIVE HEALTH SIGNS** – a greater percentage of Oxford County residents rate their overall health as very good or excellent and have gotten their flu shots in the past year, and very few teens are smoking, which is good news for their futures. However, a smaller proportion of people report that their mental health is very good or excellent, which remains a concern.
-  **LIBRARIES ENHANCE LEISURE OPPORTUNITIES** – Oxford County residents make far more visits to their libraries than almost every other rural and small urban region in the province, and have many more programs offered there than most Ontarians receive elsewhere.
-  **LIVING STANDARDS SHOW GOOD ECONOMIC SECURITY** – despite a lower median income, Oxford County has one of the highest rates of employment, lowest rates of unemployment, and lower percentages of residents living in low income and in food insecurity – although more men than women enjoy these higher living standards.
-  **LONGER WORK HOURS, BUT LESS TIME PRESSURE** – more Oxford County employees spend long hours at work and have less flexibility in the hours they do work, but they have much shorter commute times and a smaller percentage of them report feeling high levels of time pressure.

Overall, a slightly greater percentage of residents in Oxford County report a higher level of overall life satisfaction (86.8%) than residents of West Region (86.1%) and Ontario (85.6%), and only a slightly lower percentage than for Canada overall (87.1%). Despite some of the challenges to wellbeing described in this report, residents appear to be celebrating in the County's strengths and managing the challenges. This level of satisfaction reflects the ways in which the domains are connected and influence one another – as one aspect of our lives presents a challenge, another aspect provides support. Collectively, all of the domains define our wellbeing.

This population-level view of Oxford County helps to identify areas to celebrate as well as areas where more work needs to be done. As reflected in the results of the Community Wellbeing Survey, by diving more deeply into the data, we can better understand if some groups and communities within the County are at greater risk than others are. Are people living in low income feeling less connected and accessing fewer opportunities for employment, nutritious food, and other resources? Are new Canadians moving into the County facing greater challenges than longer-term residents? Are residents of some municipalities doing better than others?

In each case, by highlighting the challenges, we are better positioned to understand why some residents have higher levels of wellbeing, overall and in particular areas, while others may not. With that knowledge in hand, we can respond more effectively with programs, services, and policies that can lift everyone in Oxford County to higher levels of wellbeing.