



2024

Navigating Change

A decade of Vital Signs®

In 2013, the inaugural County Foundation Vital Signs® report was published, highlighting challenges within our community and spurring action from community members.

The 2024 Vital Signs® report reflects on the past decade, highlights emerging priorities, and anticipates future challenges.

Prince Edward County's

VitalSigns®

 The County
FOUNDATION



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Vital Signs 2024

Produced by The County Foundation, Vital Signs® provides a comprehensive snapshot of community well-being issues in Prince Edward County.

Its purpose is to inform decision-making, support actions to enhance our collective quality of life, and help direct resources where they will have the greatest impact.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The County Foundation does its work in and from the traditional territory of Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee peoples.

These peoples agreed to mutual sharing obligations and responsibilities as stewards of the land and water. We recognize that these are now our shared obligations working in partnership with our current neighbours, the Mohawk Bay of Quinte peoples.



Methodology

Data is drawn from both quantitative and qualitative primary and secondary sources. Statistical data was gathered from a variety of sources at the national, provincial, and municipal levels, as well as from studies conducted by community and regional organizations. For this report, statistical data primarily comes from Statistics Canada unless otherwise noted. The complete bibliography is available online at PECdata.ca.

From the wealth of data surveyed and the input of our Advisory Committee, we carefully chose our areas of study and selected indicators for them based on:

- availability and consistency of data
- reputation and reliability of the source
- how current the data was
- relevance to our community
- suitability of the data to be tracked for future comparisons.

Where data is available, trends from the past 10 years are presented.

Information that is specific to Prince Edward County (PEC); combined with Hastings County (HPE); or with Lennox and Addington County (PELA) is indicated throughout.

Executive Summary

The 2024 Vital Signs® report reflects on the past decade, highlights emerging priorities, and anticipates future challenges.

Community	Prince Edward County has recently seen population growth following a decade of decline, along with increased turnover and a rise in seasonal residents—the fastest-growing demographic. Shifts in age and minority groups reflect changing community dynamics, with a median age 16.5 years above the provincial average, making it one of the oldest populations in Ontario. A slight increase in the youth population during the pandemic has strained the capacity of childcare services and primary classrooms.
Economy	Socioeconomic challenges are deepening, with widening income gaps and declining affordability. A shrinking workforce-age population exacerbates these issues, and limited access to childcare has become a barrier to employment. Small businesses, which make up 99.1% of local establishments, are under pressure. However, self-employment and remote work are growing, while Thrive PEC continues to push for sustainable growth.
Education	While there has been progress in adult educational attainment and high school graduation rates, challenges remain. Skilled trades certification has declined, performance gaps in student math and literacy persist, and under-resourced early childhood development remains a crucial factor in long-term educational success.
Environment	As the County grows, balancing development with environmental sustainability is key. Priorities include protecting farmland, mitigating climate change, safeguarding water resources, and preserving ecologically sensitive areas.
Food Security	Food insecurity rates remain high, worsened by rising food costs. Addressing these challenges and shaping food priorities in Prince Edward County are critical for community well-being.
Health	One of the primary care challenges is that our local system lacks the capacity to support population growth, having been chronically underfunded for years. Healthcare staffing shortages continue to strain the system, though new resources are improving primary care access. Older adults face greater health risks, and mental health issues are prevalent, with limited support infrastructure available.
Housing	Rising housing costs are impacting community well-being, increasing the risk of homelessness. While PEC has limited emergency housing options, efforts are underway to address this gap. New housing developments and alternative housing solutions are on the horizon, potentially offering some relief.
Safety	Prince Edward County maintains a lower crime severity compared to the Ontario average, but issues like fraud, impaired driving, and intimate partner violence persist. The Community Safety & Well-being (CSWB) Plan is taking steps to address these concerns.
Transportation	Improving transit options and preparing for increased traffic are essential as the population grows. Initiatives to expand electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure and connect more of the community are underway.

Sustainable Development Goals

Think Globally, Act Locally to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are integrated into the Vital Signs indicators, aligning with the efforts of Community Foundations of Canada and global organizations to create a more sustainable and equitable future.

These goals address critical global issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and the promotion of peace and justice.



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In 2015, Canada joined all United Nations (UN) Member States in adopting ambitious goals for sustainable development, as outlined in Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda centres on a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), encompassing social, economic and environmental dimensions.

Learn more at sdgs.un.org/goals

Vital Signs® 2013 to 2023

In 2008, **The County Foundation** was established by a group of individuals with a vision of "**Working together to build a place where everyone belongs and all can thrive.**"

The County Foundation is one of 207 Canadian community foundations providing leadership and funding for local initiatives.

Vital Signs®, Canada's largest community-driven data initiative, led by community foundations and coordinated by Community Foundations of Canada, measures local vitality and supports actions to improve quality of life.

2013

The inaugural Vital Signs report, **Taking the Pulse of our Community**, revealed troubling statistics: low high school graduation rates, high food insecurity, and the adverse effects of inadequate public transportation.

2015

The **Moving Forward Together** report highlighted community progress in transportation, education, and food insecurity.

2018

The 2018 report, **Building a Place Where Everyone Belongs**, provided insights to inspire action and guide resource allocation.

2023

Building Bridges of Inclusion focused on belonging and the challenges of urbanization while preserving community.

2022

The report, **Toward Sustainable Change**, highlighted pandemic-driven changes and how PEC is adapting for the future.

2021

Meeting the COVID-19 Challenge report offered insights into the local socio-economic impact of COVID-19.



Vital Signs® 2013 to 2023

Collaborative Progress

The data in the 2013 Vital Signs report served as a catalyst, inspiring collaborative community action to address these issues.

Supported by The County Foundation, working groups were established in 2015 to set priorities and lead projects in food security, education, and transportation, with economy initiatives added in 2021.



The Food Collective of 25 local organizations works toward the vision that "every person in Prince Edward County has the means to consistently access and afford nutritious food."

Key initiatives include:

- A Community Gardens pilot project in Picton
- A long-term Food Security Collective Impact project
- The establishment of a temporary Food Depot during COVID-19 to address immediate needs.



COUNTY YOUTH COLLECTIVE

The Greater Than County Youth Collective, initially established by 28 partner organizations, is dedicated to raising Prince Edward County's high school graduation rate to match the provincial average by 2026.

Although still below the provincial average, local graduation rates have risen by 7.5% since 2013.

Getting Around Transportation Collective

19 organizations collaborated to envision an integrated transportation system for Prince Edward County that is sustainable, accessible, affordable, and responsive to community needs.

In August 2020, County Transit services were launched.



Thrive PEC was established to collaboratively develop a renewed vision for community and economic development in Prince Edward County. The findings and recommendations were summarized in a report by University of Guelph.

Key initiatives include:

- Asset based community mapping
- Thrive Symposium (March 2023)
- Community Benefits Network
- Workforce Development

Learn more at thrivepec.ca

Key Socio-Economic & Demographic Trends

Community



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11: Make communities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Over the past decade, our community has undergone significant changes, shown in various socio-economic and demographic trends. The Vital Signs data overview highlights these trends and projects future developments. Understanding these patterns is essential for informed decision-making and strategic planning, helping our community address current needs and prepare for future challenges and opportunities.

"The only thing constant is change."
Heraclitus

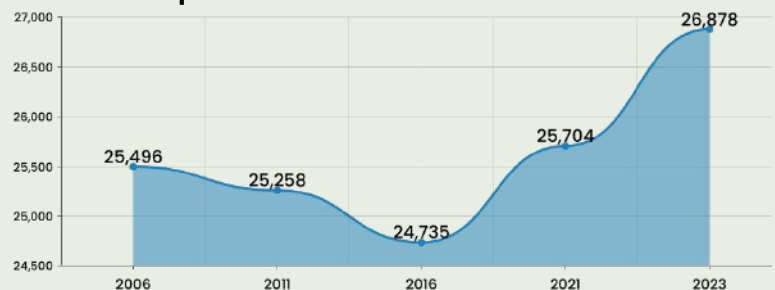
Accelerated Rate of Population Growth

After a decade of population decline from 2006 to 2016, PEC is now experiencing growth. With the local birth rate remaining stable, this increase is driven by higher in-migration.

What are the implications of population growth on housing, infrastructure, and public services?



Population Growth 2006 to 2023



Higher Rate of Population Turnover



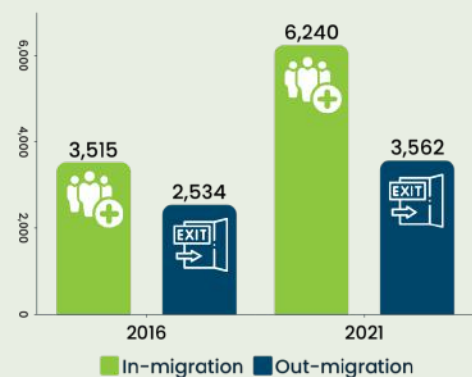
Between 2016 and 2021, PEC saw an influx of new residents, partly due to the pandemic and the rise of remote work. However, more residents moved away than during previous census periods, driven by factors such as affordability, gentrification, and real estate trends.

This increased turnover led to a 9% decline in residential stability, which measures the percentage of residents staying at the same address for five or more years, reflecting community continuity, investment, and neighbourhood connectivity.

How does faster population turnover affect residents' sense of community and connection?



Population Migration



Seasonal Residents: The Fastest Growing Population

25%

25% of PEC's population consists of seasonal residents. In 2021, this represented around 8,644 seasonal residents aged 18 and older (according to the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation, MPAC). When combined with the 26,878 permanent residents, the total population is approximately 35,522.

The County's seasonal population (those who own seasonal properties) has been increasing faster than the permanent population.

In addition, PEC's population drastically increases in the summer due to tourism. In 2022, there were 1.13 million tourist visits to PEC. (VisitPEC)



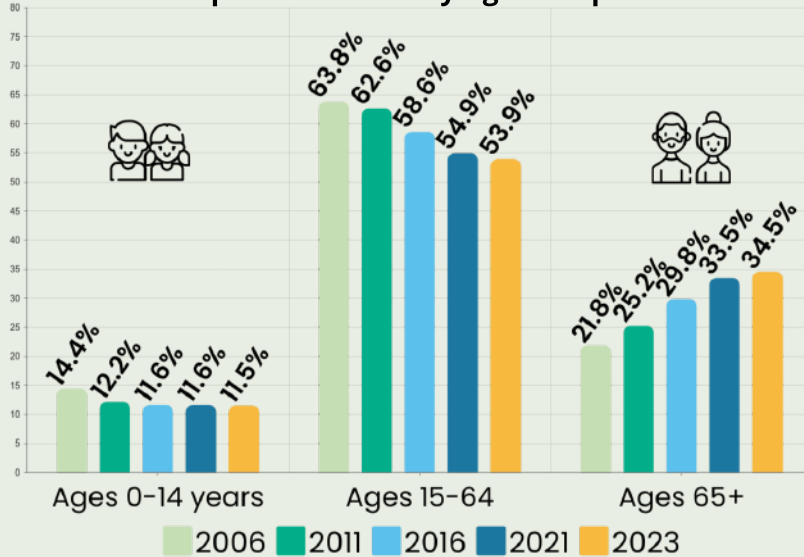
How do population fluctuations impact healthcare, emergency services, public safety and community dynamics?



The Population is Shifting by Age and Demographics

Prince Edward County is experiencing an aging population, a declining workforce-aged demographic, and increasing racial and cultural diversity.

Population Shifts by Age Groups



The number of youth (ages 0-14) has been declining since 2006, with a slight bump upwards in 2021. However, due to the overall population growth, the proportion of youth within the total population remains relatively unchanged.

This increase is straining the capacity of childcare services and primary school classrooms.

The workforce-age population (15-64) is projected to decrease to 50.7% by 2046, one of the lowest in the province (*Govt of Ontario*). The out-migration of youth remains a threat to the sustainability of our rural community.

After 2031, the growth in the number of seniors (age 65+) will slow and is projected to peak in 2036. (*Govt of Ontario*)

PEC Median Age **56.5**

Ontario **40**

PEC's Median Age: 16.5 Years Above Ontario

PEC's higher median age shows that the community is significantly older than the provincial average. Although PEC's median age has increased by 8.8 years since 2006, it has recently started to decline, similar to the trend in Ontario.

What role can community organizations and local government play in preparing for these demographic shifts and ensuring that all age groups are supported?



Minority Populations are Increasing

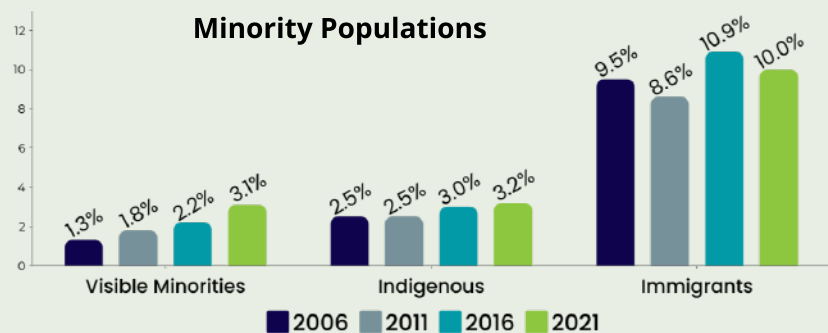
The rise in minority populations brings diversity and cultural richness to our community.

How can individuals and our community support smooth integration and foster mutual understanding?



An inclusive community is welcoming to diverse groups of people, including seniors, youth, children, Indigenous peoples, immigrants and newcomers, gender diverse, persons with disabilities, people experiencing mental health challenges, and low-income populations. (*Accessibility Canada, Pathways to Recreation*)

Minority Populations



Economy



SDG 8. Ensure sustained and inclusive economic growth to drive progress, create decent jobs for all and improve living standards.

Increasing Socioeconomic Challenges

The Ontario Marginalization Index tracks different types of marginalization, including economic, ethno-racial, age-based, and social factors

Since 2011, PEC's Marginalization Index has risen slightly from 3.25 to 3.5. Higher scores reflect greater challenges. (Public Health Ontario, Statistics Canada)

Marginalization is the exclusion of individuals or groups from full access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making due to factors like race, gender, or economic status, leaving them with less power and representation.

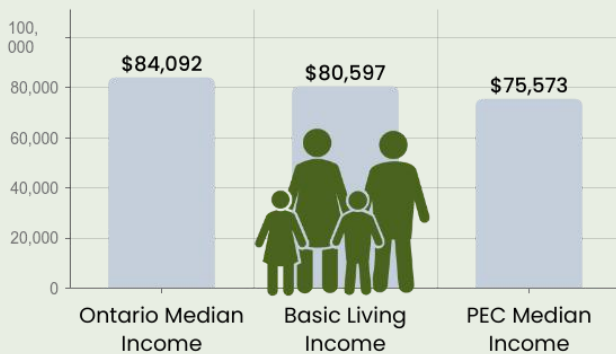
Factors influencing PEC's marginalization score:

- increased population growth and turnover along with greater diversity in race, language, and culture
- large senior population (PEC 34.5% / ON 18.5%)
- larger proportion of people not participating in the labour force (PEC 48.9% / ON 37.2%)
- greater reliance on government income supports (PEC 19.9% / ON 17.1%)
- higher dependency ratio - fewer people are earning money to support the needs of the non-working population (PEC 82.1% / ON 52.4%)
- more households needing major repairs (PEC 7.3% / ON 5.7%)



Income Gaps in Prince Edward County

Household After-tax Income in 2023



The median after-tax income in Ontario is \$84,092, compared to \$75,573 in PEC. (Environics Analytics)

The Living Wage Network estimates that an annual after-tax income of \$80,597 is needed for a family of four to maintain a basic quality of life in Eastern Ontario.

Of the 868 certified living wage employers in Ontario, 5 are in Prince Edward County. (Living Wage Network)

Disparities between wages and the living wage contribute to low-income households and impact job recruitment and retention for low-wage positions. (OECD, 2022)

How can the community work to ensure a living wage for all residents?



“The median gross household income in the County is \$82,000. Fifty percent of residents here cannot afford a one bedroom apartment.” Ellis Ziegler, Affordable Housing Supervisor Prince Edward County

Declining Affordability

The combination of high inflation rates and declining government support has led to a drop in affordability, placing a heavier financial burden on households.

Inflation and Reduced Government Support

- In 2022, Canada experienced its highest inflation rate in 40 years, peaking at 8.1%
- Since 2022, there has been a decline in government income supports, which previously bolstered incomes through pandemic-related benefits and EI program adjustments.

Accessing Child Care is a Barrier to Employment



Difficulty accessing child care has caused about one-third of respondents to adjust work or study schedules, reduce hours, or delay returning to work. (Statistics Canada 2023)

Could a solution to the child care crisis in PEC contribute to higher household incomes?



The HUB Child and Family Centre now has a waitlist of 424 children, a significant change from 2013 when there was no waitlist at all.

The current capacity for registered full-time child care is 174 spaces, constrained by both staffing and space limitations.

Economy



Thrive PEC: Residents' Vision for Sustainable Growth

In 2021/22, over 400 PEC residents participated in Thrive PEC community conversations to shape a renewed vision for community and economic development in Prince Edward County.

The insights from these sessions were gathered and analyzed in a University of Guelph report, revealing that PEC residents are deeply committed to their community's future. The rapid pace of change is a common concern, with many acknowledging the importance of new investment and tourism in driving the local economy. Residents expressed a strong desire to have a say in managing growth sustainably, with a clear emphasis on finding balance. (*Thrive PEC*)



Businesses are Facing Many Pressures

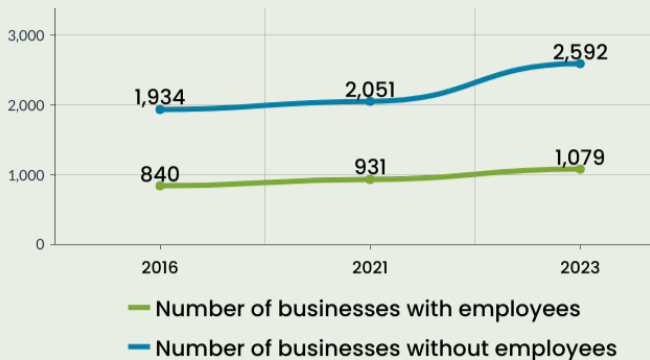
Employers are contending with workforce shortages, skill gaps, rising input costs and debt load. (*Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB)*)

What supports do local businesses need to thrive in this economy?



Self-Employment and Remote Work are on the Rise in PEC

As of June 2023, Prince Edward County had approximately 1,079 business establishments with employees.



The pandemic contributed to an increase in self-employment, reaching 2,592 individuals. This growth has further enhanced PEC's already higher-than-average proportion of self-employed workers, with 25.5% in PEC compared to 14.6% in Ontario.



Remote work and working from home increased significantly, rising from 11% in 2011 to 27.6% in 2021.

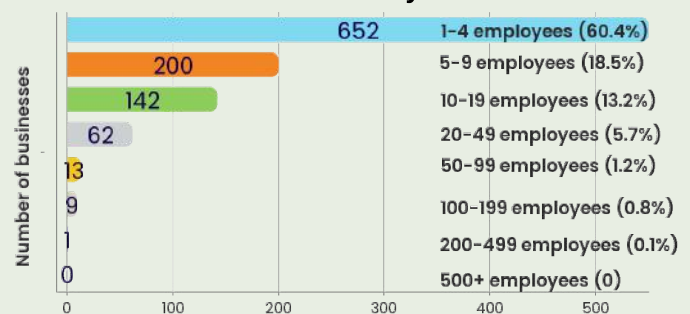
Small Businesses Comprise 99.1% of the Total

Like most regions in Canada, the majority of businesses in PEC are small.

Of the businesses with employees, 60.4% have fewer than five employees (micro businesses) and 99.1% have fewer than 100 employees (small businesses).

There are 10 establishments with 100 or more employees.

PEC Businesses by Size



Education



SDG 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Elevating education is a priority objective for The County Foundation, as it plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall quality of life and well-being of our entire community.

Progress in Adult Educational Attainment

Credentialed Residents 90.8%



As of 2021, 90.8% of PEC adults aged 25 to 64 have earned a certificate, diploma, or degree, up from 85.1% in 2011.

More PEC students pursue college or non-university diplomas than the provincial average (31.2% vs. 23.6%), while fewer pursue university degrees (24% vs. 36.8%).

Although adult educational attainment has been rising, the changing demographics of new residents may be a contributing factor.

How can high school graduates be encouraged to pursue in-demand building trades that offer solid incomes?



Every gain in community educational levels makes a positive difference. A one percent increase in adult literacy would create an economic benefit of \$67 billion in the gross domestic product for Canada (2018 prices).

(Deloitte LLP. An Economic Overview of Children's Literacy in Canada)

Decline in Skilled Trades Certification



In PEC, 820 people (6.7%) hold an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma, down from 2,315 (12.2%) in 2011. This decline mirrors a broader provincial trend, with Ontario's rate at 5.1%.

The shortage of skilled tradespeople has been developing for years.

Around 700,000 of the four million Canadians working in the trades are expected to retire by the end of the decade. *(Employment and Social Development Canada)*

(below) Technical skills students at Prince Edward Collegiate Institute



Youth Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET)



The NEET rate, representing youth not in employment, education, or training, signals social disconnection risks. In Canada, the rate for ages 15-29 spiked to 14% during the 2020 pandemic but has since dropped to 11%, below pre-pandemic levels and the OECD average of 13%.

What Happens to Youth Who are Suspended from School?

Local school suspension rates are high, with the HPE Public School Board at 4.08% compared to 2.23% across Ontario. *(Govt of Ontario)*



Are there sufficient alternative learning resources available to help these students succeed?

Rebuilding Momentum: Schools Recovering Post-Pandemic



Students and teachers are still grappling with the long-term effects of COVID-19 disruptions. Many children and youth have experienced disengagement, chronic attendance problems, declines in academic achievement, and decreased credit attainment during the pandemic, with the impact far deeper for those already at-risk. *(Whitley, Beauchamp, Brown 2021)*

In the Hastings Prince Edward District School Board (HPEDPSB), absenteeism remains a challenge, especially among Grade 12 and Grade 8 students, with Grade 8 being the most concerning.



How can the community help to improve school attendance rates?

Education



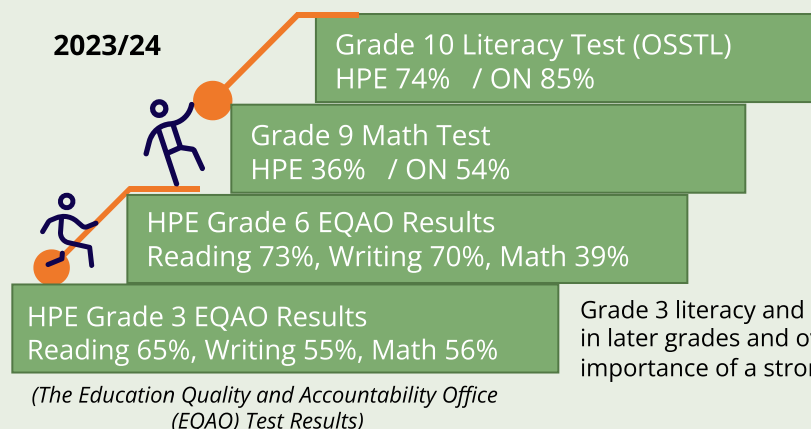
More Students are Graduating from Grade 12

The 2013 Vital Signs report highlighted low Grade 12 graduation rates in the HPE District School Board.

Since then, additional resources have been allocated to support students and reduce barriers to success. While graduation rates have improved, an achievement gap still persists. (*Ontario Ministry of Education, School Board Progress Reports*)

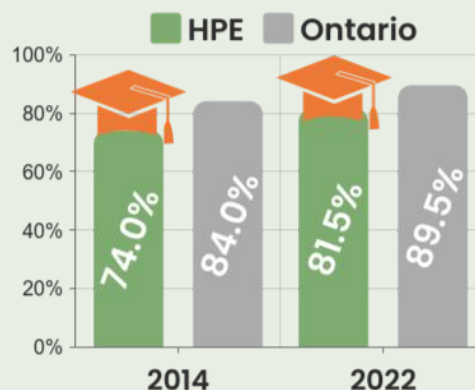
Progress in Literacy & Math

Reading, writing, and math scores for students in grades 3 to 10 have historically fallen below the provincial standard, with math scores being particularly concerning—a trend reflected across Ontario. However, progress is being made in the post-COVID period.



Grade 3 literacy and math scores are predictive indicators of success in later grades and overall academic achievement, highlighting the importance of a strong start and early intervention.

Grade 12 Graduation Rates (5 years)



HPEDSB is proud of the growth in graduation rates and EQAO OSSTL results over the past two years. Despite the pandemic, we maintained literacy and math results until 2024, when we saw a dip in grade 3 and 6 literacy."

*Katherine McIver
Director of Education*

Barriers to Academic Success

Canada's high school dropout rates average 5–14%, rising to 50% or more in marginalized communities.

Youth in these areas face barriers including limited access to nutritious meals, financial instability, inadequate educational resources, transportation issues, and language barriers. (*Pathways to Education*)



The Lifelong Impact of Early Childhood Development



Early literacy skills are linked to better outcomes in personal and economic well-being throughout a child's life and into their adulthood. (*Deloitte, An Economic Overview of Children's Literacy in Canada*)



Canada ranks 33rd out of 35 OECD countries for early childhood education enrollment. (*Early Years Study 4: Thriving Kids, Thriving Society*)

Children from low socioeconomic communities are nearly twice as likely to fall behind in early development skills compared to their higher-income peers. (*Pan-Canadian Public Health Network*)

How can the community strengthen early development programs to improve children's long-term well-being?



Environment



SDG 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Balancing Growth with Environmental Sustainability



PEC is facing an unprecedented surge in development applications.

Managing this growth requires balancing sustainable development practices, preserving farmland and green spaces, ensuring attainable housing options, and investing in infrastructure improvements to support the expansion.

Protecting Farmland

Between 2006 and 2021, PEC's farmland decreased by 34,706 acres (-23.8%).

23.8%
decrease in farmland

As of August 2024, three PEC farmers have secured permanent land protection of 515 acres through Ontario Farmland Trust, with three more applications to be completed in 2024 (455 acres).

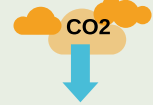
Mitigating Climate Change

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, mainly driven by human activities such as burning fossil fuels and deforestation. These actions increase greenhouse gas concentrations, trapping the sun's energy around the earth. (*United Nations, Quinte Conservation*)

PEC is experiencing the early effects of climate change – increasing weather volatility, wind storms, increasingly frequent polar vortices and ice storms, hotter, longer droughts, unpredictable thaws and extraordinary flooding events and predictable long-term effects of hotter climate and intermittent sustained droughts and flooding like desertification, soil erosion and greater risk of grass and forest fires. (*Prince Edward County, Climate change resolution, May 16, 2019, Item 6.11*)

Climate change could also impact PEC's shorelines, beaches, dunes, agriculture, and wineries (*Ontario Provincial Plan on Climate Change, January 2023*) which are crucial to the local economy.

In 2021, PEC Council committed to reducing corporate and community greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. (Motion 2021-787)

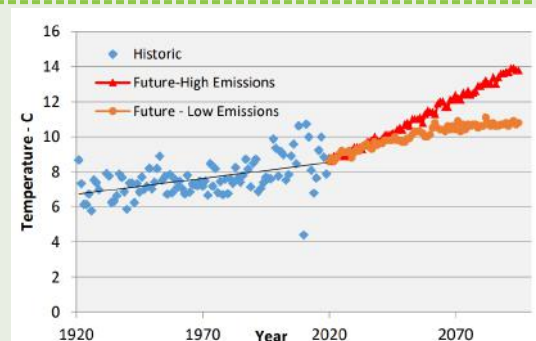


Milestone 2 of the Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program, which involves setting emissions reduction targets, has now been successfully completed.

What does the Future Climate look like?

Climate models and projection of future climate for Ontario suggest that by 2050 the average annual temperature for the Quinte Region will rise by approximately 2 to 3 °C with average annual precipitation staying about the same.

The graph at right shows that Belleville annual temperatures have been steadily increasing since 1920. High emissions of carbon are predicted to increase temperatures. (*Quinte Conservation*)



Will the Great Lakes region become a Climate Haven?

With plenty of fresh water and a moderate climate, the Great Lakes region could be seen as a climate haven.

Already, two American cities, Buffalo NY and Duluth MN have been declared as climate havens, and Toronto ON is looked at as a model for development that is preparing for the mass migration of populations from areas most affected by climate change — coastal flooding, heat extremes, wildfires. (*TVO's The Agenda, 2022*)

What collective impact could we achieve if everyone took three simple actions to reduce their environmental footprint, like planting a tree, driving an electric vehicle, or creating a rain garden?





Protecting Ecologically Sensitive Areas

The South Shore of Prince Edward County holds exceptional natural heritage value due to its diverse habitats and species. Numerous community organizations in PEC, landowners and conservation agencies have been working tirelessly to protect the unique and dynamic landscapes found there.

Within this area, the Monarch Point Conservation Reserve will protect nearly 4,000 acres, recognized as both an International Monarch Butterfly Reserve and an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. (*Govt of Ontario*)

In addition, PEC has five conservation areas, national wildlife areas, and areas of scientific and national interest.



Safeguarding our Water Resources



Local surface water

The watershed consists of surface water-lakes, streams, reservoirs, and wetlands-and all the underlying groundwater.



The Quinte Conservation WATERSHED Report Card 2023 rates the Prince Edward Region Watershed as fair, while most of the Quinte Watershed is in good to excellent condition. Higher water quality is found in areas with more forests and wetlands, while lower quality is often linked to urbanization and agricultural development.

Bay of Quinte

The Bay of Quinte serves as a vital drinking water source for around 70,000 people, yet it is also recognized as an Area of Concern under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.



In 2017, a fuel spill from a barge in Picton Bay shut down water intakes and a water treatment plant for about a week. (*International Joint Commission*)

Water - Too much or too little

PEC experienced record-high water levels in Lake Ontario during 2017 and 2019, resulting in shoreline damage and flooded roads.

Conversely, with the rapid pace of development, providing adequate waterworks infrastructure has proven challenging.

The community has been active in advocating for improved water quality and protection measures, with significant progress demonstrated in the Bay of Quinte Remedial Action Plan.



Lake Ontario

Lake Ontario is a vital source of drinking water for nine million people and is facing serious pollution challenges. The lake receives pollutants from the other Great Lakes, as well as agricultural runoff and urban and industrial waste from its own basin.



Plastic pollution is a significant problem, with an estimated three million pounds entering the lake annually and taking about 450 years to decompose. This pollution releases harmful chemicals like BPA, contaminating the water and creating microplastics that pose serious health risks (*U of Toronto*).

To combat this, the Canadian government has banned single-use plastics under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA), requiring manufacturers to collect and recycle their plastic waste.

Food Security



SDG 2.1. End hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.

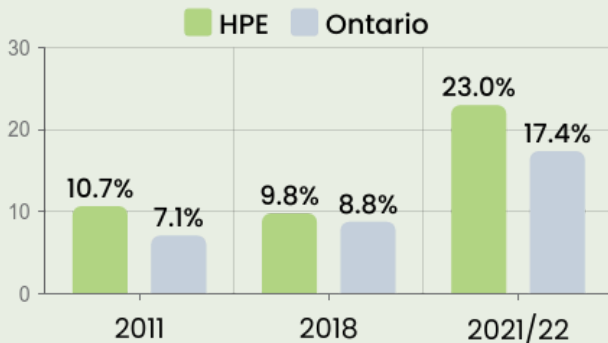
Food Insecurity Rates are High

Food insecurity is not a food availability issue. Food insecurity is an income issue.



Almost one in four households (23%) in Hastings Prince Edward (HPE) has inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.

Rates of Food Insecurity



Note: Use rates with caution.

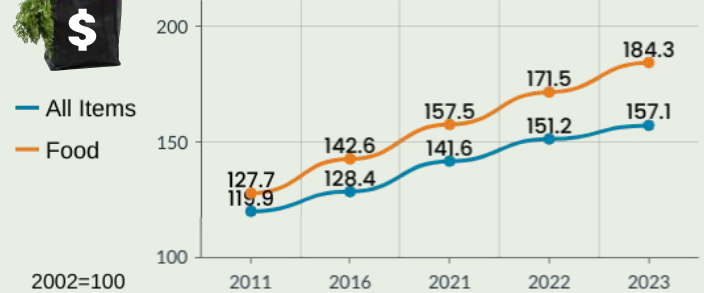
Food insecurity in HPE is higher than the provincial average of 17.4%. Before the pandemic, the region made modest progress in reducing rates, although it remained above the provincial level. (*Public Health Ontario, 2021/22*)

Food Costs Have Risen Sharply

Food prices have risen more sharply than other living expenses, with a 5% to 7% increase in 2023. High food prices mean that consumers are decreasing both the quantity and quality of food they are buying. Canada's Food Price Report forecasts some relief in 2024, with increases of 2 to 4%.



Consumer Food Prices 2011 to 2023



The Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures the average prices of a basket of goods and services to estimate the cost of living and inflation. The base year is 2002, set at 100.

Access to nutritious food is vital for infant brain development, as the brain can grow by up to 300% during the first three years of rapid cognitive growth. (*Canadian Nutrition Society*)



What steps can be taken to ensure every person in PEC has the means to consistently access nutritious and affordable food?



Shaping Food Priorities in Prince Edward County

In March 2021, the County Food Collective surveyed 98 individuals facing food insecurity, 18 frontline workers, and 7 food programs to identify local priorities, barriers, and resource needs.

An expert panel of food innovators also shared insights, program adjustments, and best practices with the Food Collective, in collaboration with the County Community Foundation and the Prince Edward Learning Centre.

Food Security Recommendations

Collaboration, Attitude & Behavior Shifts, Local Food System Transformation, Political & Financial Support to form a coordinated, sustainable approach to address food insecurity in PEC.



(above) A youth cooking class at The County Food Hub.



SDG 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Pressures on Healthcare Resources Continue to Challenge the System

The shortage of healthcare workers is causing increased pressure and burnout among those currently employed.

8 physician spaces (of 23) in PEC need to be filled (PEFHT September 2023)



County Docs has secured 7 physicians, but ongoing recruitment is vital due to retirements, COVID-related strain, fewer medical students choosing family medicine, and a growing local population. Strategies to reduce barriers for healthcare talent include:

- The Doctor Accommodation Network (DAN) provides housing for locums and new physicians, offering vital relief for family doctors.
- A state-of-the-art, 96,000-square-foot hospital is set to open in 2027, as well as a nearby medical clinic offering resources and space for doctors.
- The redevelopment of HJ McFarland Memorial Home will more than double its size.
- A shuttle provides transportation for Personal Support Worker and Nursing student placements between Loyalist College, the hospital, and McFarland Home.
- Local bursaries support PEC residents looking to advance their healthcare education.

94.9 family physicians
per 100,000 in HPE

101.6 family physicians
per 100,000 in Ontario

HPE Ontario Health Team August 2023

In the early 2000s, there was a real possibility that Prince Edward County's hospital would close forever. In April 2013, Patrons of Our County Hospital (POOCH) rallied at Queen's Park to protest hospital cuts that could lead to its closure.

New Resources: Primary Care Access for PEC Residents

The nurse-practitioner-led Community Clinic, opened on February 27, 2024, is designed to provide primary care for PEC residents who do not have a primary care provider.

Since April 2024, the Health Care Connect Premium (HCCP) program has connected 750 PEC residents to a family doctor, with an additional 500 expected within four months. As of April 2023, there were 4,000 PEC residents without access to primary care.

One of the primary care challenges is that our local system lacks the capacity to support population growth, having been chronically underfunded for years. Despite efforts to be innovative with limited means, primary care— the gateway to our health system— remains under-resourced, which increases pressure on hospitals and the broader healthcare system."

*Barinder Gill, Executive Director
Prince Edward Family Health Team*

Older Adults are at More Risk of Health Concerns



Hastings Prince Edward residents face increased health risks, with a higher median age and greater prevalence of chronic diseases (*Ontario Public Health*) and amputations (*Ontario Health*) compared to the provincial average.

Support is essential for:

- Preventive healthcare
- Helping seniors live independently at home longer



How can the community support overall health and well-being?

High Rates of Mental Health Issues with Limited Support Infrastructure

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the mental health of Ontario students.

59%

of students surveyed say the pandemic has made them feel depressed about the future.

39%

of students surveyed report that the pandemic has made their mental health worse.

18%

of students surveyed have seriously contemplated suicide in the past year.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Local mental health support for both children and adults is scarce, with long waitlists and limited services. Addiction treatment requires travel to Kingston for the nearest detox program.

PEC OPP have seen a 25% increase in mental health act incidents in 2023 (over the 9 year average 2014 to 2023). (*Police Services Board 2024 Report*)



Where does the hope exist?"
(a 20-year old youth advocate)

How does the growing issue of poor mental health among workers, especially in high-stress sectors like agriculture, impact productivity, job satisfaction, and long-term sustainability across all industries?



Housing

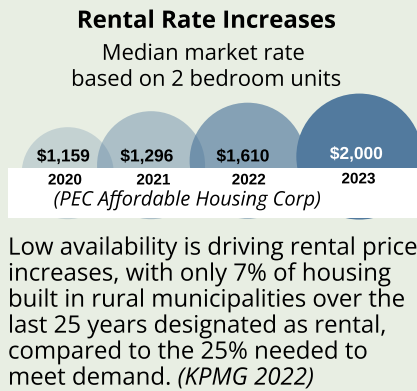
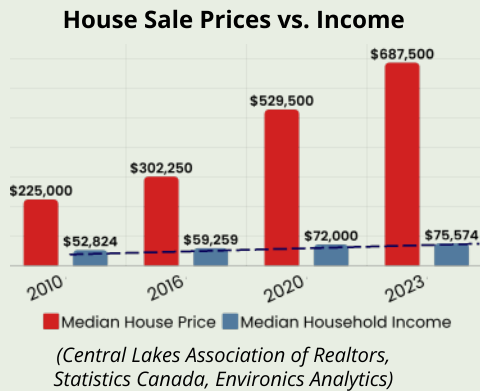


SDG 11.1 Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing.

Escalating Housing Costs Affect Community Well-Being

The social and economic well-being of a population depends on affordable housing. In recent years, housing prices have surged beyond local incomes, driven by second-home buyers, investors, short-term rentals and retirees, reducing the supply of affordable homes.

Limited high-density housing, such as apartment buildings, reduces affordable options, while housing prices remain disproportionately higher than in other parts of the region.



Exploring Housing Alternatives

Rising housing costs and limited housing options are driving an increase in alternative forms of housing.



Multi-generation households grew from 1.7% in 2006 to 2.3% in 2021.

New construction can't keep up with demand, and high costs make housing unaffordable for many.



Cohousing, house sharing, tiny homes, secondary suites, and multiple residences on one lot are emerging as affordable housing solutions.

The Risk of Homelessness is Increasing



Housing insecurity is rising among low-income residents, with rural homelessness often hidden in tents, vehicles, or through couch-surfing. By November 2021, over 45 individuals were identified as homeless in PEC, with estimates suggesting three to five more for each recorded case. (Prince Edward - Lennox & Addington Social Services)

Those seeking subsidized housing in Prince Edward County now face a seven-year wait, as the number of units has remained unchanged since 2018, while households in need have nearly doubled from 230 to 433. (Prince Edward - Lennox & Addington Social Services)



A 7-year Wait List

What does affordable housing look like to you?



PEC has limited emergency housing options, but efforts are being made to close this gap. Alongside housing support offered by Kate's Rest and Alternatives for Women, Leeward House—opened in April 2024 at the former Maples retirement home—now provides supported congregate living with on-site staff for nine individuals experiencing homelessness.

Housing Developments on the Horizon

Imminent construction, pending availability of water and sewer capacity.

Years	# of units	Details
2025-2032	4,199	Half are shovel-ready; 6 developments include affordable housing allocations from 5% to 100% of the units
2033-2043	4,564	

(County of Prince Edward, Building Unit Count August 2024)

There is an urgent need for a diverse range of affordable housing models, including shared housing, rentals, co-ops, elder care support, as well as subsidized, worker, and publicly funded emergency housing.

Community Benefits

The Community Benefits Network is a group of local businesses, organizations, and individuals dedicated to ensuring that new developments positively impact the community.



Safety



SDG 16.1 Residents are safe and secure, in person and online.

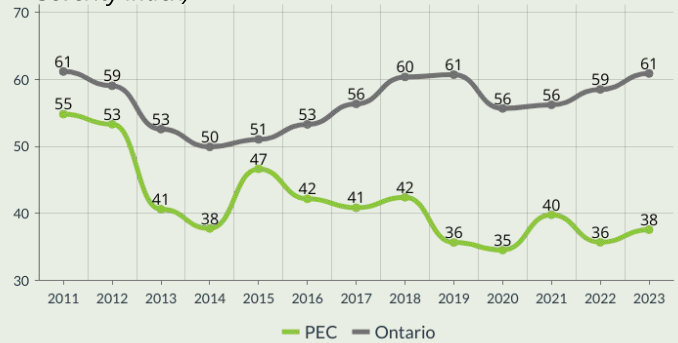
PEC Crime Severity is Low Compared to the Ontario Average

The Prince Edward County Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) is dedicated to keeping violent crime rates low and enhancing access to victim support services for those affected by violence.



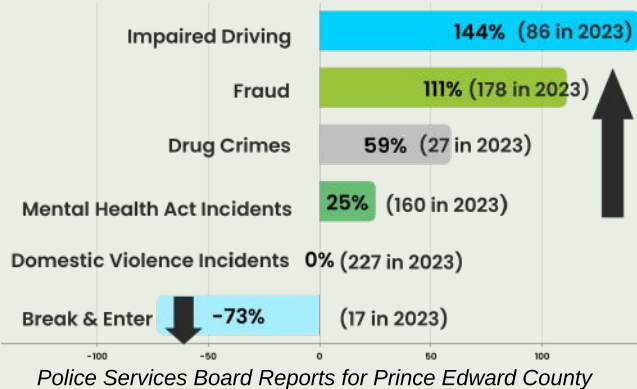
Non-criminal incidents make up 75-85% of police calls, leading PEC organizations to work closely with the OPP to address these social issues.

The severity of police-reported crime in PEC is lower than the Ontario average. (*Statistics Canada Crime Severity Index*)



Trends in Crime Rates

9 year average compared to 2023 (2014 to 2023)
Percentage change



Incidents of **Break & Enter** are decreasing through the efforts of the Community Street Crime Unit.

Impaired driving is the leading criminal cause of death in Canada, yet entirely preventable. OPP Staff Sergeant John Hatch attributes the rise in PEC numbers partly to RIDE programs and traffic stops, which deter and catch impaired drivers, the majority being local residents. Expanded public transportation options are being introduced to give alternatives to driving.

In 2023, 178 **fraud** cases totaling \$815,000 in losses were reported. The rise in cases may reflect greater awareness and comfort in reporting, with seniors being especially vulnerable to online and phone scams.

The continued high volume of **domestic and intimate partner violence** incidents has led to the assignment of a dedicated officer for response and follow-up.

Since July 2022, the IMPACT program has revolutionized **mental health crisis response** by pairing mental health workers with officers, easing de-escalation, reducing apprehensions, and lessening trauma.

Growing demands on the PEC OPP Detachment will lead to a 25% increase in officers, from 40 to 50, over the next five years.

Community Safety & Well-being (CSWB) Plan Actions

The Community Safety and Well-being action teams, made up of local organizations, work together to create long-term strategies that ensure safety and well-being for vulnerable individuals and communities.

How can individuals contribute to a safer community?



Housing & Homelessness



Mental Health & Problematic Substance Use



Intimate Partner Violence



Senior Support



Poverty Reduction

Transportation



SDG 11.2 Provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations.

PEC is a challenging geographic area to service, with 77% of the population residing in rural communities and 1,200 km of roads to maintain with a low-density tax base.

91.3% drive to work.
5.9% walk or cycle.

33.5% have a commute of less than 15 minutes.

58% of residents commute to jobs within PEC.



Connecting the County: Improving Transit Options

County Transit ridership rose to 717 in July and August 2024, an 80% increase from the 401-ride average in 2023 and 2022.



County Transit integration with Google Maps has made transportation more convenient, with fixed-route service between Picton, Bloomfield, and Belleville running weekdays five times daily.



Coming soon! On-demand door to bus stop service will be available via a phone app, and it's open to everyone!

What would encourage you to use public transportation?

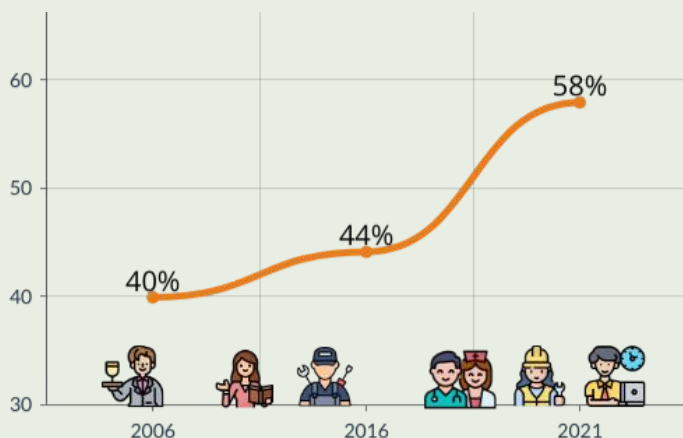


Lack of transportation is a barrier to accessing fresh food, securing employment, completing education, and staying connected with the community.

Bus passes are available to residents on social assistance.
(Prince Edward - Lennox & Addington Social Services)

Fewer Residents Traveling Outside PEC for Work

In 2006, 40% of the workforce was employed within PEC. By 2021, this figure had increased to 58%.



Charging Ahead

The Canadian government's goal of 100% electric vehicle (EV) sales by 2035 has implications for infrastructure and grid capacity.



Photo credit: Plugshare



Preparing Public Transit for a Growing Population

With 4,199 new housing starts expected by 2032, population growth could add over 2,000 cars to local roads. To minimize the impact, it's crucial to provide adequate public transit for residents, families and workers.

Challenges and Opportunities



As our community evolves, its priorities shift, presenting both challenges and opportunities. Foundational issues like education, food security, and transportation remain critical, while new concerns—affordable housing, healthcare, and economic resilience—demand attention. These changing needs test our capacity but also offer opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and community strengthening.

Following are Challenges and Opportunities that were identified through the data and interviews with community subject experts.



Community

Challenges: Managing service and infrastructure demand alongside population growth, shifting demographics, resistance to change, rising residential instability, urbanization, retaining a community sense of belonging, gaps in technological skills and sustainable funding and staff support for not-for-profits

Opportunities? What steps can be taken to expand child care and youth spaces? What strategies can develop culturally appropriate resources to support and engage new residents? In what ways might the Thrive *Get Connected Directory* strengthen community connections? How can not-for-profits secure sustainable funding?



Economy

Challenges: Limited commercial and industrial space, the need to diversify and strengthen the economy, capacity building, attracting and retaining capital investment, a declining workforce-aged population, disparities among income levels, and the potential impact of climate change on the economy

Opportunities? How can repurposing existing buildings optimize space for industrial and commercial use? What support is needed for startups and entrepreneurial ventures to boost local economic growth? What can be done to improve workforce development in trades, healthcare, and childcare? How can youth mentoring programs help cultivate future leaders? What strategies can attract vertical investment to drive economic development? How can green technology and sustainable practices be embraced for long-term growth?



Education

Challenges: High rates of absenteeism, elevated school suspension rates, low standardized test scores, insufficient resources for early childhood development, lack of extra-curricular activities for children and youth

Opportunities? How can the community address the factors contributing to high rates of absenteeism and school suspensions? How can low standardized test scores be improved? What steps can expand the capacity and awareness of early childhood development programs? What resources are needed to enhance alternative learning environments? What resources or initiatives can enhance support for extra-curricular activities for children and youth?



Environment

Challenges: Pressure from development, risks posed by climate change, threats to water quality, loss of habitat, and the diminishing farmland and number of farmers

Opportunities? What actions can individuals take to help protect the environment? What advocacy efforts are needed to protect environmentally sensitive areas and safeguard natural resources? How can funding for the Bay of Quinte Remedial Action Plan be expanded to cover all of PEC? What steps can facilitate the Farmland Trust's efforts to preserve agricultural land? How can farmers and business owners be supported with succession planning for long-term sustainability?



Food Security

Challenges: Persistent high food insecurity, reliance on volunteer-operated food banks, limited accessibility at some food bank locations, high grocery prices, and stigma surrounding low income

Opportunities? How can we develop a sustainable system to address food deserts and improve access to healthy food options? What can be done to reduce the stigma associated with low income and food insecurity? What funding sources can be secured for grocery gift cards to promote dignity and choice for those in need? What advocacy efforts are necessary to promote living wages?



Challenges and Opportunities

Continued ... Challenges and Opportunities that are identified in this report:



Health

Challenges: Insufficient primary care resources in a large rural area, high rates of chronic health conditions, healthcare understaffing, limited capacity in long-term care homes, poor mental health and a lack of mental health services, and the amalgamation of public health units

Opportunities? What strategies can secure funding to extend the Community Clinic's hours of operation? In what ways can the community advocate for increased utilization of Nurse Practitioners to enhance healthcare accessibility? How can we better serve the healthcare needs of a large rural area? What funding is necessary to support seniors in living healthier and longer at home? What measures can strengthen workforce development in healthcare? What advocacy efforts can expand mental health services to meet growing community needs?



Housing

Challenges: Lack of attainable housing on local incomes, shortage of rental units, lack of emergency shelters and transitional housing

Opportunities? What adaptations are necessary to address evolving housing demands resulting from shifting demographics and population growth? What alternative housing models can help address affordability and diverse needs? How can the community support purpose-built affordable and supported housing projects and combat NIMBYism (not in my backyard)? How can Community Benefits Agreements with developers secure broader benefits? What steps can be taken to address the shortage of emergency shelters and transitional housing?



Safety

Challenges: Increasing rates of impaired driving and fraud, and persistently high rates of intimate partner violence

Opportunities? What strategies can public awareness and education campaigns utilize to effectively address fraud prevention and the dangers of impaired driving? What preventative measures would reduce the incidence of intimate partner violence? How can access to shelters be improved for victims of intimate partner violence?



Transportation

Challenges: Rising traffic congestion with population growth, maintaining aging transportation infrastructure, expanding public transit in a vast rural area, and lack of after-school transportation

Opportunities? How can we maintain aging transportation infrastructure in the community? What strategies can be employed to expand public transit in a vast rural area? How can we secure funding for ambassador training programs to help residents effectively navigate and utilize public transit? What solutions can address the lack of after-school transportation?



New in 2024- The Vital Impact Fund



Introducing the **Vital Impact Fund**, a signature initiative of The County Foundation, designed to address the challenges, gaps, and opportunities identified within our community.

The Vital Impact Fund is a discretionary fund of The County Foundation, made possible through generous gifts through the estates of Wynne Thomas and Doug and Kathy MacPherson.

Rooted in the insights of our Vital Signs data, this fund combines research with targeted grants to better meet the evolving needs of Prince Edward County. As the community's priorities shift, the Vital Impact Fund will remain adaptable, ensuring ongoing support for the well-being and growth of the County.

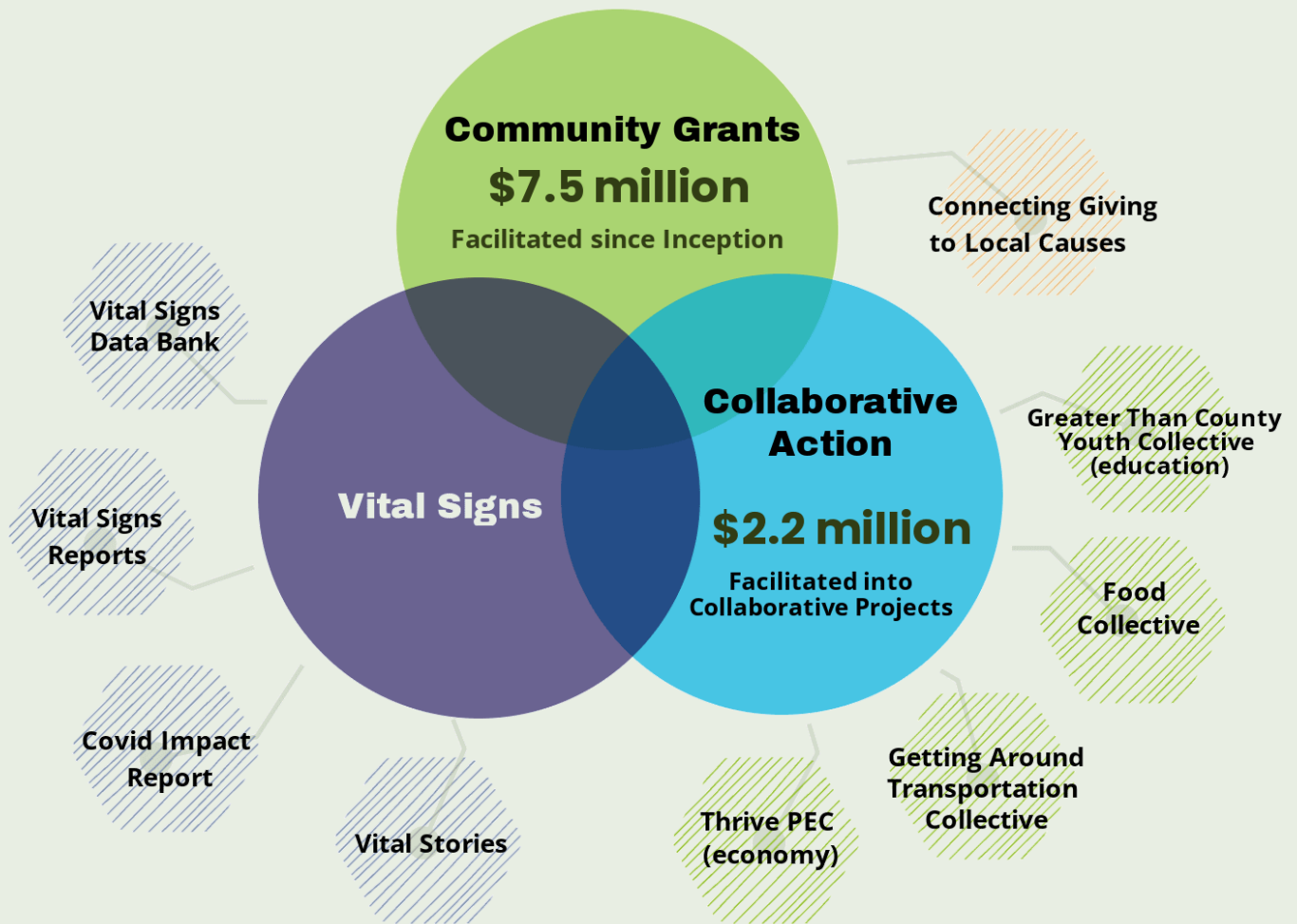
Vital Impact

Since its inception in 2008 with a single fund worth \$125,000, the Foundation has grown, managing 37 funds with total assets of approximately \$10 million. Annually, the Foundation allocates around \$1 million in funds to support various community causes. The Foundation has three key activities:

Collecting and analyzing data to produce *Vital Signs*, a leading-edge report that identifies fact-based social and economic community needs.

Developing charitable funds and facilitating *grants* to community groups that build capacity to address community needs.

Catalyzing and supporting *collaborative action* toward transformational change.



Areas of granting

- Community
- Youth & Education
- Food Security
- Poverty Reduction
- Housing
- Transportation
- Health & Wellness
- Arts & Culture
- Agriculture
- Recreation
- Safety
- Heritage
- Environment
- Animal Welfare

Thank You to our Vital Signs Sponsors



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

Acknowledgements and Sources

We are grateful for the contributions of the Vital Signs review team and the community organizations and individuals that provided statistics, reports and comments, all of which informed the preparation of this report. The complete list is online at PECdata.ca along with reference sources.



**CALL to
ACTION**

You can help us make a difference. We invite you to get involved by:

SHARING this report with others.

DISCUSSING the information.

VOLUNTEERING with a group working on addressing the issues.

CONTRIBUTING to a current fund that supports VitalSigns® priorities.

CREATING a fund or making a bequest.

Contact us at: The County Foundation • thecountyfoundation.ca

info@thecountyfoundation.ca • 613.519.4470