



# Meeting the COVID-19 challenge

## Social impact and response in Prince Edward County



Health care staff at Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital

March 20, 2020 to March 31, 2021

Prepared for: **The County of Prince Edward**



Prepared by: **The County Foundation**



## About this report

### Purpose

The County Foundation (TCF) was engaged by the County of Prince Edward to research and report on the social impact of COVID-19 on Prince Edward County (PEC). The data reflects on the well-being of our community. Data is organized primarily around the County Foundation's Vital Signs® 2018 Report areas of focus.

### Benefits

This report will be used by the Municipality and the Foundation to inform priority social actions in Prince Edward County. It will provide Vital Signs® working group members and community organizations with relevant and timely information to support decision-making and grant applications. It is also hoped that this report will encourage community members to contribute to the well-being of our community.

### Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

The County Foundation acknowledges that we are on 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 in partnership, to continue to protect the land and water. As we talk about the land, we honour the Indigenous ancestors who came before us and who continue to be present in lands which we occupy. We acknowledge and honour the First Nations who despite attempts of colonialism, continue to hold and share their rich history, traditions and cultures that are proud, modern and vibrant. As we move forward, we hope that every time we get together we acknowledge all those that have come before us.<sup>1</sup>

### For more information

A digital version of this report will be available online at [thecountyfoundation.ca/vital-signs](https://thecountyfoundation.ca/vital-signs)



### The County Foundation

As one of 191 community foundations in Canada, we're proud to enable people to realize their dreams and improve lives in the County. Since 2010, we've facilitated \$2.5M in local grants and currently manage \$5.9M in assets. As the local lead for Federal and Municipal COVID-19 emergency funding, the County Foundation granted more than \$1M in 2020 alone. Our [PEC Helping PEC COVID-19 Fund](#) inspired \$204K in donations from individuals and businesses.

[thecountyfoundation.ca](https://thecountyfoundation.ca)



### Vital Signs®

Vital Signs® provides an evidence-based snapshot of a community's strengths and challenges.

It identifies current actions and opportunities for further support and community collaboration.

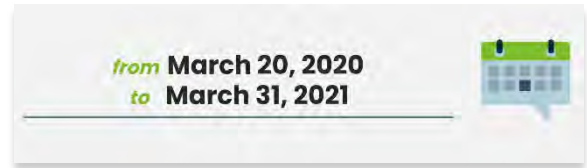
Vital Signs® provides a platform for discussion, innovative ideas and collective action.

**VitalSigns®**

# Methodology

## Timeframe for this Report

While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, this report covers the period from March 20, 2020 to March 31, 2021.



## Data Collection

Data is drawn from 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 by community and regional organizations.

Qualitative data reflects the thoughts and opinions of 55 key County service providers who represent 44 organizations. Researchers conducted 30 in-depth, one-on-one video interviews as well as 25 phone and email conversations.

Participants	Individuals	Organizations
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>44</b>

## Areas of Study and Indicators

Guided by data as well as staff input from the Prince Edward County Community Services, Programs and Initiatives department, areas of study are based on The County Foundation’s Vital Signs® framework as well as:

- a. Availability and consistency of data
- b. Reputation and reliability of the source
- c. How current the data was
- d. Relevance to our community
- e. And suitability of the data to be tracked for future comparisons.

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

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are embedded in the indicators, in alignment with the work of **Community Foundations of Canada** to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. SDGs address global challenges of poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.<sup>2</sup>

Sources of data used are included on [page 47](#).



## Thank You!



We are grateful to Community Foundations of Canada; to the community organizations that provided statistics, reports and comments; as well as to all community members who participated in the process.

## About COVID-19



COVID-19 is a new viral disease first identified in late 2019.

On March 11, 2020 it was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization.

In Canada, border restrictions and mandatory quarantines were imposed for travellers and those displaying symptoms. Residents were advised to “stay home, stay safe” to prevent transmission of the virus. By late March, all provinces mandated the closure of schools, universities, public playgrounds and nonessential businesses. In addition to physical distancing, large-scale movement restrictions – referred to as ‘lockdowns’ or ‘shutdowns’ – can slow COVID-19 transmission by limiting contact between people.

On April 9, Prime Minister Trudeau warned that "normality as it was before will not come back full-on until we get a vaccine for this", and that residents would "have to remain vigilant for at least a year." <sup>3</sup>

Great crises tend to trigger societal shifts. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to test our resilience and significantly widens the inequity gap.

**Can we create a ‘new normal’ that considers all people’s needs?**

**What opportunities are emerging to help us ‘build back better’?**

## Introduction

In mid-March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted how we lead our lives. How we communicate, work, shop, learn, travel and socialize immediately changed. The upheaval caused by the pandemic goes well beyond its medical impact. It is a human, economic and social crisis.

We were forced to pause and shelter in place. With a deadly virus lurking in our midst, our mortality was realized and we started thinking about what matters. Glaring inequities were exposed as the crisis compounded many of the social and economic hardships facing marginalized people. The pandemic has upended the status quo and knocked us out of complacency.

While life in lockdown necessitates close, constant contact with our families and partners, physical distancing measures are isolating us from our friends and wider communities. The pandemic is reinforcing the value of human connections and a sense of belonging.

This report explores the social and economic impact of COVID-19 on Prince Edward County and the community response to this crisis.



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# PEOPLE, PLACE and CULTURE – OUR COMMUNITY

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):** Sustainable Community (SDG 11) and Reduced Inequality (SDG 10)

1. Introduction.
2. PEC's pandemic experience compared to Ontario's.
3. Shutdowns and social isolation test our connection and resilience.
4. The volunteer base has shifted.
5. Public awareness and activism propel action to address long-standing inequities.

## 1. Introduction

Prince Edward County is a rural island community in Southeastern Ontario, with amenities and services clustered in two main towns. The local economy supports a broad range of small-scale entrepreneurs, and employment is concentrated in the hospitality/tourism and agricultural sectors.

98% of PEC residents speak English at home. 5.2% are Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.<sup>4</sup>

Our population is older, with the median age at least 13.2 years higher than Ontario's.<sup>5</sup>

The estimated population of 25,464<sup>6</sup> increases in the summer with seasonal residents and visitors who are drawn to our pastoral landscapes, beaches, wineries, restaurants and unique history.



The Government of Ontario declared a provincial emergency on March 17, 2020<sup>7</sup> followed on March 26 by the announcement of a [state of emergency](#) in the **County of Prince Edward**.<sup>8</sup>



**Hastings Prince Edward Public Health** enforced physical and social distancing and wearing of face masks in public spaces. This was just the beginning. Provincially-mandated regional lockdowns based on infection rates, as well as protocols to help “flatten the curve” for rates of infection quickly became the norm. Peoples’ lives and livelihoods continue to change significantly.



Playgrounds, recreational facilities and public buildings closed. Events and activities were cancelled.



Hoarding was a panic response to disruption of supply chains.

Shown at left are empty shelves at Picton Metro grocery store on March 15, 2020. Photo by Dawn Ayer

Knowledge gradually increased about the virus and infection control measures. Changing messages around COVID-19 created **confusion** and contributed to some skepticism about the dangers and magnitude of the pandemic. Over time, “COVID fatigue” set in as people tired of the restrictions and some ignored recommended health behaviours.

**Misinformation spread quickly.** The “infodemic” of misinformation spread as quickly as COVID-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the vast majority of Canadians relied on the internet to obtain information about COVID-19. Among those, about **4 in 10** reported that on a daily basis, they read COVID-19 pandemic information that they suspected was **misleading or inaccurate**.<sup>9</sup>

The community was generally vigilant with social distancing and wearing face masks. John Hatch, Staff Sergeant, Ontario Provincial Police – Prince Edward County reports that *“Local compliance to COVID-19 protective measures was fairly good. Some are rule-breakers.”*

**Stigma and shaming** are reactions to **fear** and **anxiety** about COVID-19. Studies show that when people link disease to behaviour, they are more likely to blame the sick and ostracize them.

Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention<sup>10</sup>

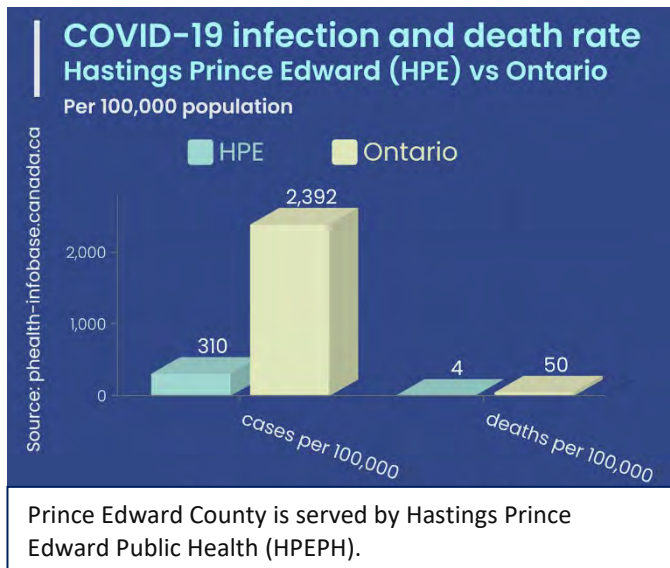


Health Canada emphasized personal handwashing hygiene and sanitizing. Physical distancing and face masks were enforced.



## 2. PEC's pandemic experience compared to Ontario's

**Hastings Prince Edward (HPE) rate of COVID-19 infection and deaths has remained markedly lower than Ontario's.**



Most of Ontario's **COVID-19 hotspots** are places with high population density that can contribute to spreading the virus. These environments include multi-generational homes, long-term care homes and food-processing plants.<sup>11</sup>

**HPE's COVID-19 case rate was amongst the lowest in the province**, at 310 per 100,000 population (as of March 31/21), compared to Ontario's at 2,392. PEC (a subregion within HPEPH) had a case rate of 180.5 per 100,000 population.<sup>12</sup> This speaks to the commitment of residents to follow public health guidelines to protect themselves and people in their community.

*"It is absolutely necessary to continue protocols. We cannot let our guard down and fall into a false sense of security, we're still highly susceptible. Public health and safety are a top priority."*

Mayor Steve Ferguson, County of Prince Edward

**The conditions where we *live and work* can affect COVID-19 exposure and infection rates.**

Underlying reasons for increased risk of COVID-19 exposure and infection can relate to crowded living conditions and the need to continue to work in certain essential occupations, both of which make physical distancing more challenging.<sup>13</sup>



**Social inequities** related to racism, social exclusion and low socioeconomic status can influence living and working conditions.

13.5% of individuals in PEC households (3,400+/- people) are low-income; Ontario 14.4%. (Low-income is defined as less than 50% of the median after-tax household income.)<sup>14</sup>

PEC **educational achievement** and attainment of post-secondary qualifications is **lower** than the provincial rate.<sup>15</sup>



**Living conditions.** Multi-generational homes and congregate/group living settings (eg. long term care homes, group homes, homeless shelters) provide less opportunity for physical distancing.

PEC benefits from smaller household sizes: average 2.2 in PEC / 2.6 in Ontario.

PEC also has more housing that is considered suitable (enough bedrooms for the household size) according to the National Occupancy Standard: PEC 98% suitable / Ontario 94%.<sup>16</sup>

However, COVID-19 has put more pressure on a PEC **housing and rental market already in crisis** and is increasing risks of **homelessness**. See [Housing p. 34](#)



**Essential services and precarious occupations** can put workers at increased risk of infection, particularly if they are unable to work from home or practice physical distancing. Women, low-income and racialized workers are often overrepresented in these occupations and have faced greater job loss and reduced hours relative to their peers. In addition, low-income workers in precarious employment are less likely to have paid sick leave.<sup>17</sup>



## Crowds of tourists from COVID-19 “hot spots” increased local anxiety.

PEC is a popular tourist destination within a day’s drive of the cities of Toronto, Ottawa and Montréal. Canadian urban centres are **pandemic epicentres**, home to an estimated 90% of all reported COVID-19 cases. The size and density of their populations and their global interconnectivity make them particularly vulnerable to the spread of the virus.<sup>19</sup>

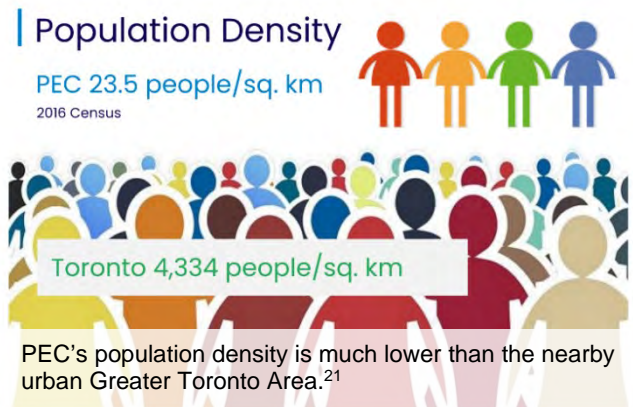
Summer is peak tourism season for Prince Edward County. COVID-19 international travel restrictions, Ontario park and beach closures and a hot summer drew an **unprecedented number of tourists**. The ensuing influx of people from COVID-19 “hot spots” increased fear and anxiety amongst overwhelmed PEC residents. Despite this increased tourism, local COVID-19 cases remained low, likely due to low COVID-19 activity province-wide and increased local precautions.



In addition, **short-term vacation rentals** add to local frustration with noise issues. Transient neighbourhoods with few permanent residents erode our **sense of community**.

John Hatch, Staff Sergeant, OPP - Prince Edward County

Commencing in October 2018, PEC Short-Term Accommodations are now regulated and limited to a maximum 15% of the homes in an area.<sup>20</sup>



Many seasonal residents who own property in PEC chose to live in PEC during the pandemic.

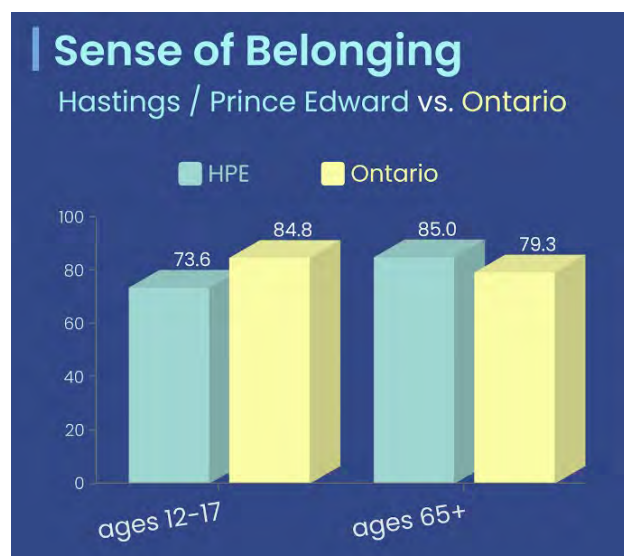


Real estate trends show a migration to rural areas, with the majority of PEC home purchases in 2020 being made by non-residents. See [Housing p. 34](#)

## Does PEC’s popularity and location present an opportunity or a threat, or both?

### 3. Shutdowns and social isolation test our connection and resilience.

The pandemic highlights the importance of social connections. **A sense of belonging** is important to build safe, vibrant communities and it brings purpose to our lives.<sup>22</sup> Social isolation can cause physical and mental health problems including depression, anxiety, as well as cognitive decline (in older people.)<sup>23</sup>



Source: Statistics Canada 2017/18 – HPE Health Characteristics<sup>24</sup>

#### Seniors

Prior to COVID-19, Hastings Prince Edward (HPE) **seniors had a strong sense of belonging**, perhaps influenced by attractive lifestyle opportunities and support services for mature residents.<sup>25</sup> **Prince Edward Community Care for Seniors** reached out during COVID to keep in touch with seniors and maintain a sense of connectedness and belonging.

#### Youth

Meanwhile, before COVID-19, **HPE youth ages 12-17 experienced a lower sense of belonging** than their Ontario peers. Physical and social isolation in the largely rural area of PEC during COVID-19 has been especially difficult for youth. Through the *Neighbourhood Outreach Response*, **Recreation Outreach Centre (ROC)** checked on youth wellness during the pandemic.

## Connecting with youth through *Neighbourhood Outreach Response*.

During the first year of COVID-19, the **Recreation Outreach Centre (ROC)** and the **Prince Edward County Youth Centre** staff saw an increase in **youth reported challenges** including difficulties with academics, conflict with the law, self-harm behaviour, suicidal thoughts, sexual health, family conflict, mental health, abuse in the home, substance abuse, homelessness and food insecurity. In 2020, 400 youth registered at ROC, a 30% year-over-year increase.

After COVID-19 shut down the **ROC Youth Centre**, staff were equipped with cell phones to continue regular engagement with youth members.

From May to December 2020, more than 200 PEC youth families received:

- 1,250+ food and hygiene kits across PEC
- 900+ frozen meals (from community partner **Food to Share**)
- laptops, cell phones, art and education supplies.

ROC continues to check on youth wellness through *Neighbourhood Outreach Response (NOR)*.



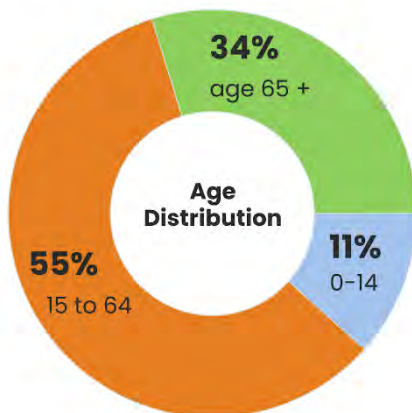
ROC's Neighbourhood Outreach Response street team made deliveries throughout PEC.

## The community supports our vulnerable senior population.

PEC POPULATION: 25,464

34% of our residents are age 65+

Source: OMAFRA – EMSI – Analyst 2021



*“Some seniors were afraid to leave their homes because of the crowds and visitors from other areas with high infection rates.”*

Mayor Steve Ferguson, **The County of Prince Edward**

Senior shopping hours, phone and email orders as well as delivery are offered at some grocery stores. The **PEC Fresh** market encourages online shopping and curbside pickup. Seniors who are 60+ have the option of free delivery.

Older people and those with underlying chronic health conditions face significant risk of developing severe illness if they contract COVID-19.<sup>26</sup>

**A third (34%) of our residents are seniors.**<sup>27</sup>

Based on the 2016 census, PEC's median\* age is at least 13.2 years higher than Ontario.<sup>28</sup>

\*Definition of median: the middle value of a range of values

From April to December, **Prince Edward Community Care for Seniors'** Reassurance Volunteers placed **14,671 reassurance calls to 1,893 clients**. Meanwhile, *Meals on Wheels* deliveries ramped up to 5 days a week and also served as wellness checks. County-wide, **more than 130 deliveries were made each week**.

Free pickup and delivery of groceries, medicine, library books and essentials as well as assistance with online grocery orders helps seniors who are self-isolating at home.

**Wellington StoreHouse Foodbank** delivers **155 meals weekly for shut-ins and seniors**. Meals are prepared by **Food to Share** and Chef Michael Hoy.

**Prince Edward Family Health Team** makes **wellness check-in calls** to patients. This was especially reassuring during the first COVID-19 shutdown. 32% of their patient population is age 65+.

## The municipal government quickly reprioritized to support residents during COVID-19.



To address potential flooding, a municipal emergency management group was formed in early March 2020. While flooding did not occur, COVID-19 quickly became the most pressing issue.

In the third week of March, four **COVID-19 task teams** were formed. Teams with three councillors were assigned to priority areas of agriculture, business, seniors and food insecurity. These teams morphed into an **Economic Recovery Team** which included the arts, real estate and hospitality sectors.

The municipality **provided residents with some financial relief**. Deferring taxes, eliminating penalties and interest for overdue utility bills and allowing one free bag of garbage pickup per week are key examples.



Mayor Steve Ferguson remained highly visible in the community, checking in with local businesses and frontline staff as well as providing regular updates through various media. The *Have Your Say* municipal website was launched to gather public feedback and input.

The **PEC Help Line** and municipality fielded almost 1300 inquiries (as of



March 31/21) from residents seeking help with COVID-19 information, volunteer

delivery of food and essentials, transportation options, community services, or to order a food box from the new *County Food Depot*.

## Businesses and organizations persevere to maintain services and connections.



Although facility doors were closed to the public during shutdowns, **essential services continued with modifications**. Local businesses and organizations found new ways to provide services. Examples include simplified curbside pickup and drive-thru, delivery services, increased online presence, virtual service delivery and outdoor space usage. Some services were put on hold, others expanded as well as new services were created to meet emerging needs.

Business processes adapted to COVID-19 workplace protocols and many employees started working from home. Videoconferencing technology quickly replaced many in-person meetings.

*"Services are being reshaped. This has been difficult, but we will be a better organization at the end."*

Susan Treverton,  
**Community Living Prince Edward**

*"On March 20 (Black Friday), everyone left the office and started working from home offices. In less than a week we had to shut down some programs that have taken 39 years to set up. A reopening plan was developed for each program. All active living programs have been moved online. The only programs not running currently are volunteer driving and congregating dining. Dining has been replaced by meal delivery or curbside pickup."*

Debbie MacDonald Moynes, **Prince Edward Community Care for Seniors**

**Alternatives for Women** maintained the 24-hour crisis line and consulted over the phone. They provided tablets to women but limited technical skills were a barrier. Alternatives is providing clients with technology instruction and ongoing support.

**Career Edge:** Pre-employment Training went virtual for *Youth Job Connection* and *Youth Job Connection Summer*, as well *HEAT (Helping Employees Acquire Talent)*. Employment counselling and job development services are now conducted at the office with PPE in place.

**Community Advocacy and Legal Centre** is setting up a "hearing room" inside the clinic. In this space, clients – especially those without access to technology or privacy – can participate in virtual hearings at the Social Benefits Tribunal or Landlord & Tenant Board.

**Prince Edward-Lennox & Addington Social Services** staff are reaching out to clients with wellness calls and support to avoid people falling through the cracks during ongoing shutdowns.



**Prince Edward Learning Centre** connected with students to assess the effect on finances and mental health. Contact methods included phone and video meetings as well as socially distanced coffee-talks, meetings in Benson Park and porch visits at people's homes. Lack of internet access and childcare were barriers for many adult students.

**The HUB Child & Family Centre** maintained services throughout, but protocols and capacity numbers were different with each stage. During periods of high-capacity restrictions, priority is given to the children of frontline essential workers.

**The County of Prince Edward** shifted some staff who worked indoors to working from home or to a limited in-office schedule. Those with childcare issues or compromised health situations could work from home if possible. More than 100 risk assessments helped to make informed workplace safety decisions. Workplace solutions varied greatly and required a lot of learning.

For people who began working from home during COVID-19, the **internet is an essential connection** to their workplaces and coworkers.

During the crisis, remote workers rely on the internet to perform their jobs, share information and motivate each other. Unfortunately, slow and unreliable internet access is a common challenge throughout PEC.

**Highland Shores Children's Aid** initially set up outdoor areas for face-to-face meetings. They also met with families virtually, which presented technical challenges but was more effective than phone meetings. They returned to in-person and in-home visits once sufficient PPE became available.

**Children's Mental Health Services Hastings and Prince Edward Counties** underwent a steep learning curve for staff who learned how to deliver services remotely. Many clients rely on cell phones for online communications.

Security and usability testing took place for new client applications. Providing virtual services increased flexibility – staff and clients can now meet at any time of day that is convenient.



Shown above, Debbie MacDonald Moynes' ergonomically equipped home office.



To help keep up morale, **United Way Hastings & Prince Edward** organized drive-thru BBQs to safely connect with the community.

The **Kinsmen Club of Picton** – serving the community since 1944 – cancelled in-person meetings and functions as well as milestone celebrations. Lost fundraising revenue due to COVID-19 closures was valued at approximately \$23,000. Despite these challenges, the Club managed to financially support many community causes.



**Community churches** are affected in many ways. While church services shift online, many congregations lose **their sense of community**, fundraisers are cancelled and outreach initiatives are put on hold. (Albury Church)

## Will organizations be permanently affected by COVID-19?

## Arts, Entertainment, Sports and Recreation are among the hardest hit sectors.

While large sports events, baseball and soccer games were cancelled, ice programming (hockey, figure skating, curling) continued with restricted capacities during COVID-19.

Festivals, theatre and live music events were also cancelled. The cultural and creative sectors are among the sectors hard hit by the current crisis.<sup>29</sup> The County has a **highly engaged creative community**. In Prince Edward County, the Arts, Entertainment & Recreation Industry represented 266 jobs in 2019, which was 44% above the national average.<sup>30</sup>

MoneySense ranked The County **9<sup>th</sup> out of 100** Canadian cities in their 'Canada's Best Places for Arts and Community' 2017 report.<sup>31</sup>



The **PEC Arts Council** strengthens the creative, social, cultural, educational and economic vibrancy of the PEC arts sector.

Their **revenue decreased 47%**

due to COVID-19 but was partially recovered through emergency relief funding.

**Art in the County** successfully went online to support local artists and their **outreach was expanded to a new audience**. The annual show may continue in future as a combined on-site and virtual event.

In mid-March, **Arts on Main** closed their doors with the lockdown. Then on May 31, after 13 years of operation, they permanently **closed their physical gallery** in Picton when they could not get rent relief. E-commerce and social media have not been as effective as a physical gallery.

**PEC Museums** partially opened two sites on July 31. Despite significant challenges, they adapted to the situation and tried **new activities**. A virtual gift shop during the holiday season was a big success. The 2021 incarnation of *Flashback February*, an annual collection of events exploring Prince Edward County's heritage, was offered primarily online.

**PEC Library** played an important role in the cultural life of the County during shutdowns by providing **curbside pickup** and online resources. **More than 41,000** e-books, audiobooks, videos, language courses and Ancestry were accessed from March to July 2020, an increase of 113% over that period in 2019.



The pandemic forced the historic **Regent Theatre** to close its doors on March 16, 2020 and threatened the theatre with the **loss of 80% of its projected annual revenue**. Staff were laid off, and the lights and air conditioning were turned off to save energy costs.

With the assistance of a municipal grant, they were able to **pivot their programming to a hybrid model**. Their content can now be live streamed to at-home audiences, or enjoyed through partner venues like the Mustang Drive-In. Designed to stabilize ticket sales, the audience uptake is limited. The Regent remains standing today because of community support.

For **venue-based sectors** such as sports, performing arts, live music, festivals and museums, the abrupt drop in revenues puts their financial sustainability at risk.

Some online alternatives have emerged with limited success. However, virtual events cannot compete with live experiences and corresponding revenues.

## 4. The volunteer base has shifted.



Volunteerism is especially important to the success of service organizations, non-profits, sports and recreation programs, festivals and fundraising events. The **number of volunteers was decreasing before COVID-19**. The County's aging population was cited as both a challenge in terms of recruiting and retaining volunteers, but also in terms of needing to drop or add services to meet community needs.<sup>32</sup>

*"The crisis has shown us how important volunteers are. In some cases, they are a critical part of the delivery of essential services such as food banks, Meals on Wheels, second-hand shops, cemeteries, providing care for other seniors. Volunteers are aging out and the pool is getting smaller."* Sandra Latchford, Volunteer

*"This experience made it very clear that there is volunteer burnout. There are many groups with limited funding and no staff. They are struggling to keep going."* Sarah Doiron, Manager, **Picton BIA**

### COVID-19 caused a **sudden drop in** the number of available **senior volunteers**.

In a press release on March 30, 2020 Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health stated "Given the greater risk of severe outcomes to Ontarians who are elderly, I am also strongly recommending that individuals over 70 years of age self-isolate ... this also applies to individuals who have compromised immune systems and/or underlying medical conditions."<sup>33</sup>

The Ontario Health announcement had an immediate impact on **Prince Edward Community Care for Seniors**, whose **base of 400 active volunteers plummeted to 60**.

Although the senior volunteer base is diminishing, younger generation volunteers have been more available during the pandemic.

**Volunteer Information Quinte (VIQ)** helped Community Care to recruit more than 100 new volunteers including younger people who were temporarily off work due to COVID-19.

*"At the **County Food Depot**, volunteers have been plentiful, willing, energetic and reliable, through initial COVID-19 lockdown and since the easing of some restrictions. Each opening, or event, engages 27 volunteers which amounts to approximately 1,320 hours of volunteer time being used to provide 1,080 food hampers during 2020."*

Tony Walton, **The County Foundation** Board Member and **County Food Depot** volunteer

Traditional volunteering has changed during the pandemic. Grassroots, online community networks like **Care Mongering PEC** help neighbours support each other by performing tasks such as grocery shopping or drug store pick-ups.



Volunteers at **Community Care for Seniors** help with the "Big Box of Cards" fundraiser. L-R Marg Werkhoven, Pronica Janikowski, Barb Proctor (Board Chair)

As infection control procedures are implemented at venues, organizations have been gradually reintroducing volunteers.

VIQ maintains a volunteer database with over 540 volunteers registered. **190 people have volunteered to help PEC agencies during COVID-19**.



**The StoreHouse Foodbank** volunteers pack Christmas hampers.

## Are younger generations likely to continue volunteering post-COVID?



## 5. Public awareness and activism propel action to address long-standing inequities.

During 2020, public activism to address race, gender, class, religion and sexual orientation inequities became widespread. Protests and online activism are propelling action here in PEC.

60% of Canadians reported seeing racism as a serious issue, versus 47% a year ago. Ipsos July 2020 <sup>34</sup>



“National origins in PEC are quite diverse and we are Mohawk, Jamaican, Japanese, Somali, Mexican, Canadian, Sri Lankan, Peruvian, Bajan, Korean, Egyptian and more.” All Welcome Here

Creating a **sense of belonging** for all the County’s residents includes acknowledging systemic discrimination and intolerance. Individuals and non-profit sector organizations are increasingly engaged in this cause.

The **Black Lives Matter** demonstration in Picton was supported by local businesses and at least 1500 participants. The energy from our community was already there. The challenge was dealing with COVID and creating the event. Judith Burfoot, All Welcome Here



Community conversations about the Sir John A. Macdonald statue brought the issues of Truth and Reconciliation closer to home.

People are advocating for the full story.<sup>37</sup>

Photo by Nina-Marie Lister 2020

Schools in the **Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board** are hosting events and initiatives to encourage, support and honour Black History, Pride and Indigenous History months.<sup>35</sup>

The **County of Prince Edward** staff and Council are undertaking internal education and training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.<sup>36</sup>

An outdoor spring 2021 event **POCnic** will highlight Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) owned businesses in PEC. AllWelcomeHere.ca

Businesses and organizations have been motivated to review the diversity in their leadership.<sup>38</sup>

PEC municipal frontline and seasonal staff will receive cultural sensitivity and conflict mitigation training to equip them with the skills to safely diffuse tense situations and to address unconscious biases that can lead to inequitable enforcement.<sup>39</sup>



“Canada could see the biggest rollback of **women’s rights** and **gender equity** if left unchecked. There is no recovery if we leave women, **Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people** behind.” YWCA Canada<sup>40</sup>

In March 2020, **women represented 70% of all job losses in Canada.**<sup>41</sup>

Assistance efforts include *Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit* (CRCB) for those whose work capacity is affected by childcare or caregiver responsibilities.<sup>42</sup>

**Discover YOUth** weekly drop-ins (virtually during COVID-19) provide an **all-inclusive safer space** for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and their allies. Every June, Pride Week is celebrated with activities and banners throughout PEC.

**Will the impetus toward equity be sustained?**

# HEALTH and WELLNESS

**Sustainable Development Goal:** Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3)

1. Introduction.
2. PEC's population faces unique health risks associated with COVID-19.
3. The existing opioid crisis intensifies.
4. Negative mental health effects are expected to last for some time.
5. The pandemic strains our health care resources.



## 1. Introduction.

Prince Edward County provides a full range of health care services to residents and visitors. Emergency and primary care is provided at Quinte Health Care **Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital** in Picton with specialized services available through **Quinte Health Care (QHC)** at its hospitals in Belleville and Quinte West.

During COVID-19, QHC leveraged **virtual patient care** as much as possible. This enabled QHC to provide care for patients without putting them or staff at risk or straining personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies. While elective surgeries and other non-emergency clinical activities are at times delayed due to COVID-19, QHC urges people to seek medical attention for chronic and acute health conditions.



On June 19, 2020, the province announced that the new **Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital** was proceeding to Stage 3 planning. As of December 29, 2020, the **hospital building campaign** had raised \$14.7 million of the \$16.5M goal. The existing 60-year-old building is nearing its end of life. Prince Edward County's new hospital will be a state-of-the-art facility, equipped to meet today's standards of exceptional care for patients.

70% of Canadians believe **virtual care represents the future**, according to the *Canadian Attitudes on Healthcare and Telemedicine Report* in November 2020.<sup>43</sup>

The **Prince Edward Family Health Team (PEFHT)** is home to 23 doctors and approximately 40 allied health care professionals. During COVID-19, they moved to more **virtual care** and continued offering all but one of their 17 programs. A dedicated *Well Baby Clinic* was established for prenatal and postnatal care that included infants and immunizations. Doctors, Nurse Practitioners and some Nurses, dressed in full PPE continue to go into patient homes where the need is most urgent.



**Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH)** serves the counties of Hastings and Prince Edward from four regional offices. They monitor the health of our local population, deliver programs and services within our communities and help to develop healthy public policies.

**Resources and staff have been diverted to COVID-19 activities.** Some programs were deferred during the pandemic. Local organizations are relying heavily on public health guidance and support during this crisis.

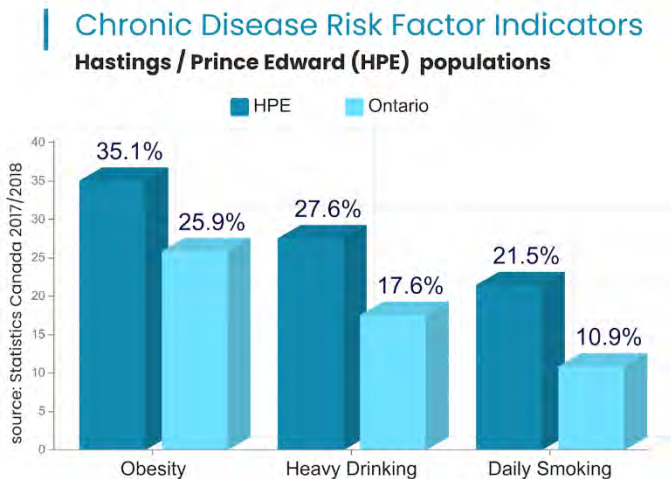
*"With a significant outbreak, we would be understaffed. HPEPH has helped out other health units in the province. This has given some insight into what can happen."* Eric Serwotka, **HPEPH Director of Public Health**

## 2. PEC's population faces unique health risks associated with COVID-19.

Hastings / Prince Edward (HPE) residents fall within several **high-risk health categories**. When compared with the province, the median age of citizens is higher, as are rates for obesity, smoking, heavy drinking and prevalence of chronic disease.<sup>44</sup>

Chronic illnesses like diabetes, obesity, hypertension, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are health risks on their own but also make a person **more susceptible to complications** from other diseases or infections such as COVID-19. These conditions are more prevalent among people with low socioeconomic status.<sup>45</sup>

**Mortality rates** from cancer, circulatory and respiratory diseases are **higher in HPE** than provincial rates. Life expectancy in HPE is 2.5 years lower (80.1 years compared to 82.6 years in Ontario).<sup>46</sup>



**Access to health care:** 11.6% of Hastings Prince Edward residents **do not have access to a regular health care provider**, an increase from 7.2% in 2016. This is higher than Ontario's rate of 9.9%.<sup>47</sup>

During COVID-19, many people are delaying seeking medical treatment, potentially worsening their conditions.<sup>48</sup>

### Long-term care in Canada was hit especially hard by COVID-19.

Residents and workers who live in group settings are more vulnerable to COVID-19. Group living such as long-term care homes (LTC), retirement homes (RH), group homes, farm bunk houses and prisons are environments where the virus may transmit more easily. During the first wave of COVID-19, outbreaks in LTC / RH accounted for **more than 80% of all COVID-19 deaths in Canada** (as of May 25, 2020).<sup>49</sup>

Up until March 31, 2021 Prince Edward County LTC / RH homes had experienced a total of one (1) COVID-19 infection, and no infections in group homes.<sup>50</sup>



H.J. McFarland Memorial Home sent a "County Strong" message of reassurance on social media.

COVID-19 revealed the impact **when physical and social environments fail older people**. Launched on March 25, 2020, the provincial *COVID-19 Action Plan for Protecting Long-Term Care Homes* added aggressive new measures and funding resources to help prevent further outbreaks and deaths from COVID-19 in LTC homes in Ontario.<sup>51</sup>

For seniors living independently, COVID-19 affected access to in-home support resources such as personal support workers. Starting in April 2021, the **Hastings Quinte Paramedic Services** will expand their services to provide more support to vulnerable seniors in their homes.<sup>52</sup>



## Staff shortages increased in congregate and group living homes.

Staff shortages increased in congregate living homes when the province implemented a sole employer policy in April 2020. To reduce the potential of virus transmission, the policy limited support staff to working at a single location. Some workers also left their jobs because of fears about their health. In an Ontario Health Coalition survey of 150 LTC homes dated July 22, 2020, **95% reported that they were short-staffed.**<sup>53</sup> This puts additional pressure on the institutions and remaining staff.

**Community Living Prince Edward (CLPE)** supports 350 children, youth, adults and families. 55 people live 24/7 in supported community homes and about 50 people receive service through Supported Independent Living. Prior to COVID-19, CLPE employed 170 staff. The sole employer policy resulted in a **loss of 15 staff.**

*"We had to keep going, we could not shut doors and stop services. The priority was how to keep people healthy and safe."*

Susan Treverton  
**Community Living Prince Edward**

## People with disabilities are more vulnerable.

Just over **one-fifth of the Canadian population lives with one or more disabilities.** In PEC, **1125 to 1200 residents** rely on income from the *Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).*<sup>54</sup> People who rely on ODSP have incomes that are 30% to 40% below the poverty line.<sup>55</sup> Income disruptions as a result of the pandemic could increase the vulnerability of people who are living with disabilities.

COVID-19 increases risks for those who have difficulty communicating, doing preventive activities, have mobility challenges, need ongoing specialized medical support, or require supervision to support independence.<sup>56</sup>

Parents of students with disabilities were especially concerned about the effects of school closures on their children.<sup>57</sup> During the January/February 2021 shutdown, the provincial government allowed school boards to keep special education classes open.

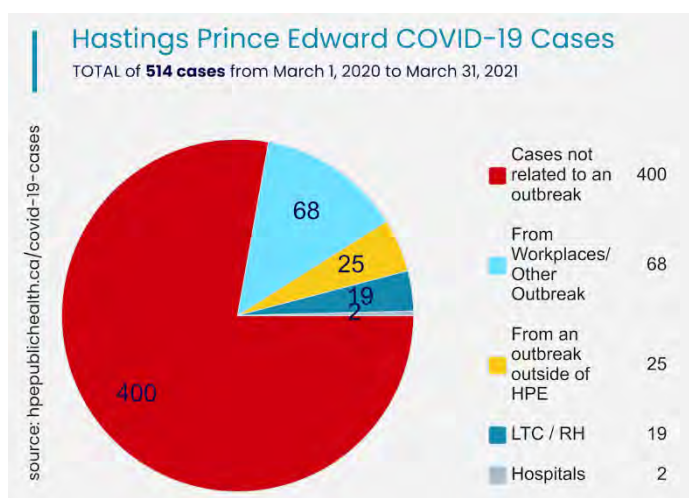
People with a disability are more likely to report **worse mental health,** experience stress, feel depressed, or have tried to harm themselves.<sup>58</sup>

Residents in **Community Living Prince Edward** group homes could not leave their homes at the onset of COVID lockdown. The restrictions and isolation were difficult.

Several interactive online platforms were developed where people could interact with friends while engaging in an activity like cooking classes.



## Hastings Prince Edward COVID-19 Cases



Up until March 31, 2021 people in the HPE region have endured **514 COVID-19 infections,** with **6 deaths.** Of those, 114 cases were related to outbreaks at workplaces, from locations outside of HPE, LTC/RH settings, and hospitals.

PEC (a subregion within HPEPH), has experienced a total of 45 cases.<sup>59</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic will continue to evolve. Previous pandemics have been characterized by waves of activity spread over months. It is important to maintain surveillance.<sup>60</sup>

## COVID-19 vaccines may be a turning point in the pandemic.



Development and testing of COVID-19 vaccines moved at record speeds. Canada started to receive its allotments in late December 2020. However, frustration mounted as vaccine supplies were delayed, while at the same time more infectious mutated versions of the virus were spreading.

HPE Public Health teamed up with **Hastings Quinte Paramedic Services** and **Quinte Health Care** to administer the vaccines starting in January 2021. The Community Centre in Picton is a mass vaccination site. Although vaccines are not mandated, HPE Public Health is strongly encouraging people to get vaccinated.<sup>61</sup>

**66% of Ontario residents** indicated they would like to get the COVID-19 vaccine immediately.<sup>62</sup>

Angus Reid Institute,  
January 2021 survey

To achieve 'herd or community immunity', somewhere between **60 to 70% of people would have to be resistant to COVID-19**, according to Dr. Noni MacDonald, Canada's representative at the World Health Organization.

The anti-vaxxer community is skeptical of vaccines and critical of health directives to receive one. This may prevent vaccine coverage from reaching the level necessary to protect the larger population. The World Health Organization (WHO) named "**vaccine hesitancy**" as one of its **top 10 threats to global health** in 2019.<sup>63</sup>

## 3. The existing opioid crisis intensifies.

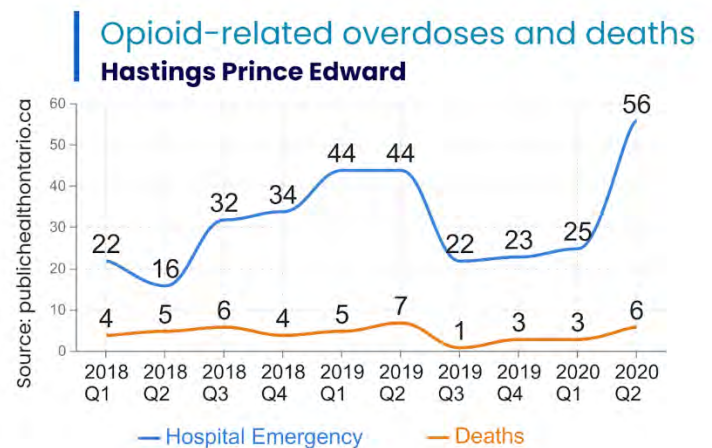


Throughout April 2020, there was a **50% increase in opioid related deaths in Ontario**. The most affected **ranged in age from 25 to 44**. While everyone has been impacted by the pandemic, many individuals who experience substance use disorders are at an increased risk due to closures, isolation and changes in services and support.<sup>64</sup>

Throughout 2020, HPE Public Health issued warnings about **high overdose rates** in the area.<sup>65</sup>

Hastings Prince Edward was one of five regions in the province to see a **30% increase in hospital attended overdoses in 2020** compared to the same period in the previous year.<sup>66</sup>

Substance use is also on the rise in Canada during COVID-19. Canadians who described their mental health as 'fair' or 'poor' were more likely to have increased their use of alcohol, cannabis and tobacco during the early stages of the pandemic. Their increased substance use is attributed to feelings of stress and anxiety, loss of routine and social isolation.<sup>67</sup>



The HPE Children's Planning Table recommendations include drug education in grades 6,7, and 8 as well as drug addiction counsellors for high school and up.

#### 4. Negative mental health impacts are expected to last for some time.



Grief has become a universal phenomenon during COVID-19. People have lost their sense of safety as well as certainty about the future, jobs and lives.<sup>68</sup> The negative mental health impacts of COVID-19 can be expected to last for some time and will place added burden on Canada’s already overwhelmed mental health system.<sup>69</sup>

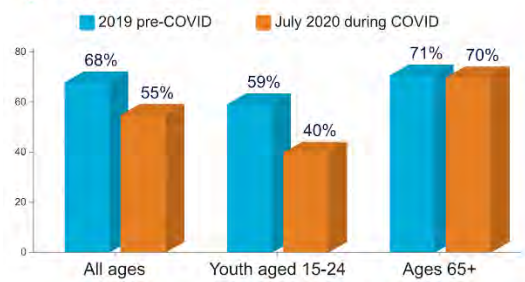
*“Staff have all reported mental health issues among our students. No one is immune, the timing varies. Life as we know it has changed. People are grieving and there is more to come. The worst has not hit yet.”*

Kathy Kennedy, Prince Edward Learning Centre

Fewer Canadians report having excellent or very good mental health at 55% (July 2020) down from 68% (2019). Youth are experiencing the greatest declines. Seniors are the only group that has not been significantly impacted.<sup>70</sup>

Young people aged 15 to 24 are more likely to experience mental illness and/or substance use disorders than any other age group. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death from adolescence to middle age.<sup>71</sup>

Mental Health Status Declines during COVID-19



Source: Statistics Canada, May 2020  
Canadians’ mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic

Children's Mental Health Services HPE extended the virtual walk-in to Mondays to Fridays from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm and continue to offer 24/7 crisis services. There is very little waiting time for intakes. When needed, they can meet with children, youth and families in person, but many people are starting to prefer virtual services. When school restarted in September and again during the provincial January/February 2021 shutdown, referrals increased. Parents and students are reporting more stress, frustration and apathy.

PEFHT Mental Health Team has seen a 15% increase in referrals during the pandemic, up from 700+ per year. Patients are dealing with higher levels of anxiety about separation from families and friends; more complicated grief reactions in the event of death or illness in their family; family members needing to go into LTC; housing and jobs; and relationship stress.

Life Satisfaction  
Canadians rating of 8 / 10 or above



Finances, health and social contacts — three pillars of quality of life — have all been affected by COVID-19.

The share of Canadians rating their life satisfaction as 8 / 10 or above fell from 72% in 2018 to 40% in June 2020.

Sources: Statistics Canada 2018, Canadian Community Health Survey and June 2020 Canadian Perspectives Surveys<sup>72</sup>

Some people are more vulnerable to the mental health impacts of COVID-19 including those who are:

- parents of children under 18, especially mothers
- young people
- in abusive relationships
- with existing mental health issues
- racialized
- with a disability
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- worried about their personal finances
- workers providing essential services on the frontlines.<sup>73</sup>



## 5. The pandemic strains our health care resources.

Our local health organizations are proactive, but it is taking a toll.

*“Right from the beginning – when we realized that COVID could be making its way to Canada – we had a team of doctors here in Prince Edward County that got together to plan.”* Dr. Norma Charriere, Medical Lead, Prince Edward County Memorial Hospital.<sup>74</sup>

HPE Public Health was among the first health units in the province to respond to the crisis and this took its toll on staff. Their 24/7 support line received 40 to 50 calls per day at all hours. It was stressful for staff and the overtime hours were excessive. They adjusted resources to add enough support.<sup>75</sup>

Hastings Quinte Paramedic Services serves PEC and was the first paramedic service in Ontario to test an innovative new provincial auxiliary medical directive. Paramedics are directed to treat and release or refer stable patients with signs and symptoms that are similar to COVID-19. This approach is helping to free up hospital resources.

The HQ paramedics are part of an Eastern Ontario rapid-response team that is increasing COVID-19 testing capacity at selected “hot-spot” sites.<sup>76</sup>



The COVID-19 assessment centres at first were overwhelmed with up to 600 people per day.<sup>78</sup>

HPE COVID-19 testing results by March 31, 2021:  
Tests processed: 109,915  
Rate of tests processed in one day: 86.8% (Ontario’s average was 68.3%)<sup>79</sup>

HPE Public Health was commended by Ontario’s Auditor General for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was one of four units in the province that met a target of 80 percent of positive tests completed within two days.<sup>80</sup>

The financial impact is enormous.



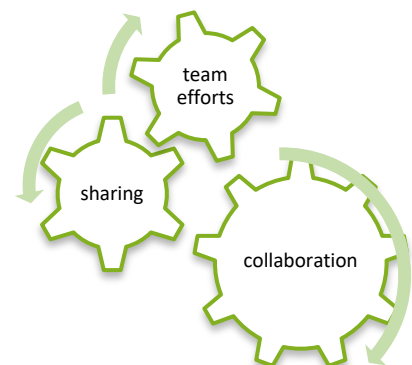
Quinte Health Care COVID-19 expenses are

**\$522,000 to \$1.1 million per month**<sup>77</sup>

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of collaboration.

*“It takes the collective action of government, agencies and individuals. If any piece doesn’t work, it falls apart. It’s important to operate as a community.”* Eric Serwotka, HPEPH Director of Public Health

The COVID-19 assessment centres are a huge team effort between staff from Quinte Health Care, Hastings Quinte Paramedic Services, Hastings Prince Edward Public Health, family health teams, local municipalities and Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board.<sup>81</sup>





During an initial **shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE)**, organizations shared their supplies with each other. Businesses and individuals also stepped up to make non-medical masks, gowns and hand sanitizer.<sup>82</sup>

*“The shortage of PPE resulted in competition and increased prices; it ultimately led to more collaboration among healthcare agencies and streamlined supply chains with economies of scale.”*

Susan Sweetman, **Children’s Mental Health Services HPE**

*“Justice & Health Partnerships are collaborations between health care providers and legal professionals. They frame legal issues in the context of overall health eg. housing problems are not just legal problems – I think we would all agree that homelessness following an eviction is bad for your health; or there could be a health issue like mold present. People need a safe, affordable, adequate place to live or it puts their health at risk.”* Lisa Turik, **Community Advocacy and Legal Centre**

*“A stronger voice has been created through alignment with Children’s Mental Health, Children’s Aid and Addictions and Mental Health. The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Children Community and Social Services and Ministry of Education are all dealing with youth, this has enabled the ministries to see how they can work together.”* Susan Sweetman, **Children’s Mental Health Services HPE**

*“The Developmental Service Sector has always taken a collaborative approach, for example Real Xchange website is an information portal where agencies can add resources like videos and public health guidance in plain language for people and families we serve.”*

Susan Treverton, **Community Living PE**

## Health care and frontline workers are experiencing high levels of risk and stress.

Frontline workers in health, childcare, long term care and group homes are caring for people despite great **uncertainty, resource limitations** and **personal risk**. In the early days of the pandemic, front-line workers reported challenges in accessing personal protective equipment and a lack of infection control measures in the workplace. COVID-19 cases in the health workforce accounted for two in ten (19.4%) of the total infected population by July. With improved workplace safety, the rate had fallen to **one in ten (9.5%)** by January 2021.<sup>83</sup>

**Women make up 80% of Canada’s health care system workforce<sup>84</sup>** and have subsequently been more impacted by the high infection rates.



3 out of 4 reported worsened mental health

Health care workers are also at **increased risk of mental health impacts** because of factors such as increased risk of exposure, staff shortages and demanding working conditions.

As of November 2020, eight months into the pandemic, **three-out-of-four (77%)** of those working in direct contact with COVID-19 cases reported **worsened mental health**.<sup>85</sup>

# SAFETY

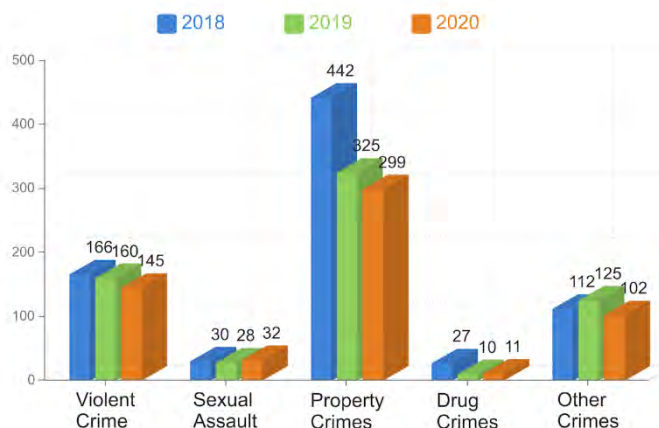
**Sustainable Development Goal:** Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)

1. Lockdowns contribute to decreased rates of property crime.
2. Combatting fraud is an ongoing issue.
3. The pandemic heightened risks for victims of domestic and child abuse.
4. Safety problems arose from an overwhelming number of tourists.
5. Community safety and wellbeing initiatives continued.

## 1. Lockdowns contribute to decreased rates of property crime.

Prince Edward County Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) reported that breaking and entering as well as thefts were down in 2020 largely due to COVID-19 lockdowns.

Shoplifting was minimized with store closures and capacity restrictions. Fewer residential break-ins occurred with more people at home during the day. However, increased online shopping created more temptations for “porch pirates”.



Source: Police Services Board Report for Prince Edward County January to December 2020<sup>86</sup>

The **Community Street Crime Unit** is a dedicated regional police group that deals with property crimes and substance abuse, which are closely related. Incidents are decreasing through these efforts.

## 2. Combatting fraud is an ongoing issue.

Phone and online scams are always changing and often originate out of country. PEC’s vulnerable senior population is frequently targeted. The OPP conduct awareness campaigns and the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre assists law enforcement agencies by identifying connections amongst seemingly unrelated cases.<sup>87</sup>

As of December 2020, the PEC OPP had responded to 89 reports of fraud during the year. **The reported losses to community members were just less than \$300,000.** It is estimated that only 5% of frauds are reported.<sup>88</sup>

**Project Safe Trade** was established in August 2020. Two parking spots are designated in front of the local OPP detachment. These neutral spots are a place where people can safely conduct transactions that they arranged online.<sup>89</sup>





### 3. The pandemic heightens risks for victims of domestic and child abuse.

Social and physical distancing measures intended to prevent COVID-19 exposure also **reduce women's access to supports** and **increase their daily exposure to potential abuse**. PEC domestic violence police reports are down 24% compared to the previous year,<sup>90</sup> and the number of calls to **Alternatives for Women** dropped by 63% in the first five months of 2020.<sup>91</sup> However, **social isolation, loss of employment** and **reduced income** are factors known to increase the risk of domestic violence and child abuse – these conditions have been heightened during the pandemic.<sup>92</sup>

*“Women who are in abusive homes may be very isolated during this time. This is the most concerning issue to come from COVID-19, a drastic drop in calls. During COVID lockdown, women didn't have the same opportunity to access services.”*

Leah Morgan, **Alternatives for Women**

A Statistics Canada study found that in April 2020, 10% of women were highly concerned about violence in the home during the pandemic.<sup>93</sup> Closures of schools and childcare facilities have added to the stress at home. Teachers and childcare providers also have fewer interactions with children and families. This means they have fewer opportunities to recognize and report signs of abuse.

### 4. Safety problems arose from an overwhelming number of tourists.



On weekends, traffic was often lined up for several kilometres awaiting admission to Sandbanks. (Photo by Friends of Sandbanks)

During the first phase of COVID-19 lockdowns (March to May 2020), decreased traffic levels led to lower rates of vehicle collisions and impaired driving. Once restrictions were lifted in late June, PEC experienced higher than normal volumes of **tourism traffic**, especially day-trippers.

**Speeding, traffic congestion and illegal parking** led to safety issues throughout the summer. Residents and emergency vehicles were impeded by long traffic lineups at Sandbanks Provincial Park and along narrow streets in Wellington. Several high-speed accidents occurred at Hwy 62 and County Road 1.<sup>94</sup>

Traffic safety will be addressed through traffic calming measures and improvement of traffic flow in Wellington and near Sandbanks; Council is requesting action by the province regarding the safety hazard at the intersection of Highway 62 and County Road 1; and more OPP officers will be available in the summer.<sup>95</sup>

Tragically, four people **drowned at Provincial Parks** in Prince Edward County during the summer of 2020. Prince Edward OPP have taken steps to establish a regional drowning prevention coalition to share information and resources to reduce deaths and mishaps related to beaches, boating, backyard swimming pools and ice fishing.<sup>96</sup>

**Increased trespassing** incidents in the summer created anxiety for residents and prevented the police from attending to other matters. When Sandbanks reached capacity and closed early, overflow crowds spilled onto other beaches, conservation areas, crown lands and private properties. **Tensions were high** and calls to the OPP about trespassing increased 47% (137 calls vs. 93 in 2019). Sandbanks Park staff as well as County staff at Wellington beach had to deal with angry people at times. The police were called when some people almost became violent.<sup>97</sup>

The **County of Prince Edward Tourism Management Plan**, presented to Council in January 2021, proposes actions that balance the needs of the tourism industry and residents. The plan recommends more bylaw officers and parking restrictions, fees and fines as well as increased security and entrance fees at some popular destinations.<sup>98</sup>



## 5. Community safety and wellbeing initiatives continued.

**Social causes for crime** include inequality, lack of support for families and neighborhoods, real or perceived inaccessibility to services, lack of leadership in communities and a low value being placed on the well-being of children and individuals.<sup>99</sup> PEC organizations are working collaboratively to counteract these problems.

The **PEC Situation Table** is an alliance of local service agencies and **PEC OPP**. They are working together to mitigate situations for people who are experiencing multiple risks with the **potential for increased victimization**.<sup>100</sup>

The **Youth Inclusion Program (YIP)** and **Youth Support Navigation Service (YSNS)** support the well-being of youth. **52 at-risk youth** have been referred to YIP since the program inception in fall 2019 and **110 individual youth** have received immediate services through YSNS since December 2020.<sup>101</sup>

The **opioid crisis has been magnified** by the pandemic. See [Health and Wellness p. 15](#)

The **Harm Reduction Task Force** is a collaboration of schools, **HPE Public Health** and the **Street Crime Unit**. The Task Force shares information and creates awareness regarding the opioid crisis in HPE.

The **Narcotics Committee**, spearheaded by **HPE Public Health**, deals with drug education and prevention. Naloxone kits and training are available and Picton has a needle exchange location.<sup>102</sup>

COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions delayed the implementation of the **Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan**. The PEC OPP detachment is one of seven in the province that completed their plan.

This three-year strategy takes a collaborative approach to **safety, education, emergency response, poverty reduction, mental health and addictions, as well as senior support**.<sup>103</sup>

### New in 2021:

More **video cameras** will be installed for community safety. Footage is available in case of an incident. An escalation of human trafficking occurrences in surrounding regions added momentum to this project.

The PEC OPP, in conjunction with the Police Services Board, is proposing that the municipality establish a **False Alarm Registry** in order to reduce police response to false security alarms. In 2019, PEC OPP responded to 373 alarms and 99% of those were false.<sup>104</sup>



(left) OPP staff demonstrated their appreciation for healthcare professionals and essential frontline workers.

# EMPLOYMENT and INCOME

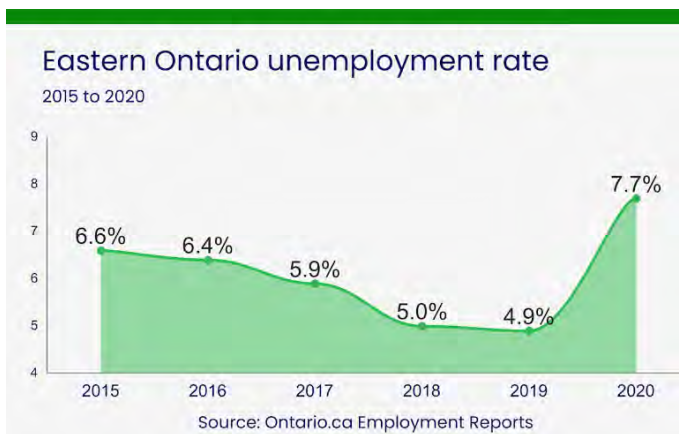
**Sustainable Development Goals:** No Poverty (SDG 1), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Gender Equality (SDG 5)

1. The economic fallout is steep and deep.
2. Employment loss affects people inequitably.
3. COVID-19 is likely to push more people into poverty.
4. Physical distancing measures are changing the world of work.



## 1. The economic fallout is steep and deep.

*“Canada experienced its worst recession since the Great Depression, but the depth of the decline was not as bad as feared during the first wave of infections thanks to extraordinary fiscal policy intervention.”* Deloitte Economic Outlook January 2021<sup>105</sup>



COVID-19 and the measures necessary to contain the virus resulted in a 5.8% **job loss in Eastern Ontario** in 2020, the sharpest percentage decline of all Ontario regions.

The 2020 **unemployment rate** jumped to **7.7%**, up from 4.9% in 2019.<sup>106</sup>

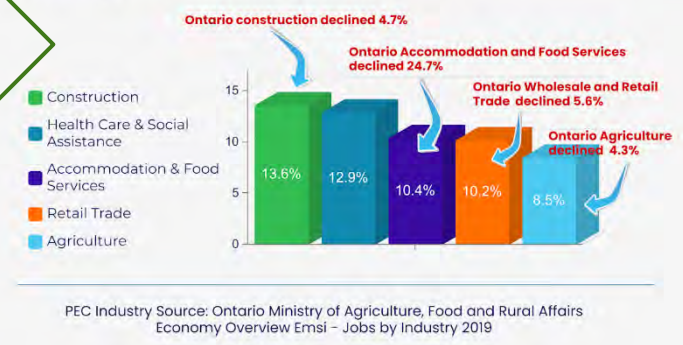
**Long-term unemployment has increased**, which can have lasting impacts on the labour market.<sup>107</sup>

Beginning March 2020, employers experiencing revenue decreases could apply for wage subsidies through the *Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy*. **Smaller businesses** (less than 100 employees) comprise **98% of businesses in PEC** and reported being **more affected**.<sup>108</sup>

From March to October 2020, more than 3.5 million people in Ontario applied for the *Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)* and *Employment Insurance*.<sup>109</sup>

Ontario’s decline in employment<sup>110</sup> affects PEC’s top industries: **accommodation and food services** (-24.7%), **wholesale and retail trade** (-5.6%), **construction** (-4.7%) and **agriculture** (-4.3%).<sup>111</sup>

### PEC Top Industries by Employment



### Micro businesses are most impacted by revenue losses.

A quarter (23.7%) of **micro businesses** (1-4 employees) reported an annual revenue decrease of 40% or more.<sup>112</sup> **Almost half of PEC’s businesses are in this size range**.<sup>113</sup>

Companies with 100 or more employees were less impacted, with 14.5% reporting decreases of more than 40%.<sup>114</sup>

Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) data indicated that more than **a third of Ontario businesses** **would not survive** the second lockdown.<sup>115</sup>





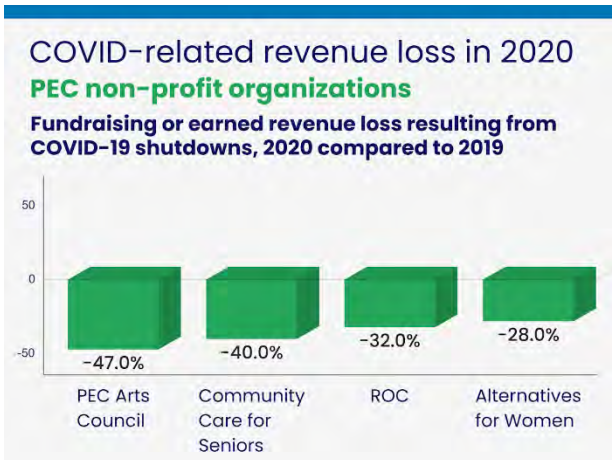
## The non-profit sector faces reduced fundraising revenues and increasing demands.

The charitable and non-profit sector plays an essential role in our community, providing **expertise and support** to our education, health care, social services and more.

Non-profit organizations that depend on earned and fundraising income are particularly hard hit. In Canada, revenue earned through **fundraising and activities** account for 45.1% of total income for the non-profit sector.<sup>116</sup>

*“The pressures on the social service sector are going to be really high. Cancelled fundraising events and a decline in individual giving coincide with increased demands for services. This pace of work for the sector is not sustainable.”*

Jodi Cooper, **United Way Hastings Prince Edward**



PEC’s non-profit sector has adapted service delivery and fundraising methods to meet the challenges of physical distancing. Despite these measures the sector is experiencing **diminishing revenues**.

Government relief funding has helped to temporarily fill the gap during COVID-19.

Canada's non-profit sector employs more than 11% of the country's workforce. Women comprise an estimated 80% of the workers in this sector.<sup>117</sup>

## The virus has accelerated shifts in workforce requirements.

### SKILL UPGRADES REQUIRED

**14%**

of workforce needs to be FULLY reskilled

**40%**

of workforce needs to be PARTIALLY reskilled

The pandemic accelerated existing trends in **remote work, e-commerce and automation**. A McKinsey Global Institute analysis estimates that 14% of the global workforce will need to be reskilled entirely and 40% will need partial reskilling to continue with their current occupations.<sup>118</sup>

#### NEGATIVE WORKFORCE IMPACTS



- Workers in food service
- Customer sales and service roles
- Less-skilled office support roles.

#### INCREASED WORKFORCE DEMAND



- Jobs in warehousing and transportation as a result of the growth in e-commerce and the delivery economy
- Workers in health care, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) occupations
- People who create, deploy and maintain new technologies.<sup>119</sup>

The **PEC Chamber of Commerce** 2020 report “Attracting and Engaging the Evolving Workforce” lists economic growth opportunities such as • remote working • entrepreneurs and small businesses • training and workforce development • local food, beverages, and agriculture • tourism • housing and real estate • arts and culture • partnership development.<sup>120</sup>

The Ontario government is providing \$77 million through the redesigned *Second Career* grant program to help people secure in-demand jobs.<sup>121</sup>

## 2. Employment loss affects people inequitably.

In Ontario, part-time and low-wage workers, those without a high school diploma, recent immigrants, youth and women experienced relatively larger employment declines in 2020.<sup>122</sup>

**PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT** decreased by 11.1%, while full-time employment decreased by 3.4%.<sup>123</sup>

Since 1998, there has been a 31% increase in the proportion of workers employed in temporary positions, such as casual, seasonal and contract roles.<sup>124</sup>

**EDUCATION:** Among the work-aged population, employment declined for all levels of education, except for a 2.5% gain by university graduates. Those with less than a high school credential experienced the greatest percentage decline in employment (11.4%).<sup>125</sup>

**AGE:** Youth aged 15 to 24 registered the greatest percentage decline in employment (15.5%).<sup>126</sup>

Young workers entering the labour market are likely to earn less in the first five years following graduation compared to historical average earnings.<sup>127</sup>

**GENDER:** Females experienced a greater decline (5.8%) in employment compared to males (3.9%).<sup>128</sup>

**Lack of childcare** during COVID-19 lockdowns created a barrier to employment, with a notable increase amongst mothers whose youngest child was aged 6 to 12.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, over half of all female workers (56%) are employed in **vulnerable occupations** involving the “5 Cs”: caring, clerical, catering, cashing and cleaning. This work is characterized by potential exposure to COVID-19, low pay, temporary work and few if any benefits.<sup>130</sup>

PART-time workers



FULL-time workers



LESS than Grade 12



University Grads



Youth



Ages 25-54



Females



Males



### More barriers to employment include ...

#### CONCERNS about INFECTION



In January 2021, more than two-fifths of Canadians (43.3%) who were employed or wanted to work were concerned about contracting COVID-19 in the workplace. Concern is highest among those with limited opportunities to work from home. This includes people who work in health care, education, retail, transportation, warehousing, accommodation and food services.<sup>131</sup>

#### LIMITED CAPACITY for TELEWORK



Workers at the bottom of the earnings distribution have less opportunity for telework and greater risk of job automation.<sup>132</sup>

The lack of reliable internet access for rural residents and businesses across Eastern Ontario has been exposed by COVID-19.

### 3. COVID-19 is likely to push more people into poverty.

Going into COVID-19, many families had limited financial reserves to rely upon in the event of an economic crisis. **About one in four families did not have enough savings to avoid falling into poverty** when faced with a two-month work stoppage.<sup>133</sup>



1 in 4 families are at risk of falling into poverty

People who lived close to or at the poverty line prior to the pandemic are suffering the most during this crisis. Many additional people who live with low income may find themselves living in poverty as a result of a long economic downturn.

### COVID-19 has intensified economic disparity.





Some people are more susceptible to poverty, including those with **disabilities, single parents, racialized families** and **elderly single individuals**.<sup>134</sup>


People who are living in poverty are more likely to face health-related setbacks; to have difficulty accessing transportation, finding and keeping a job; to find themselves in the criminal justice system; and to need various social supports and assistance. Also, children who grow up in poverty are more likely to remain in poverty as they age.<sup>135</sup>


In PEC, at least 3400 people (**13.5%** of the population) are considered to be living with a **low income**. 17.1% of all PEC children aged 17 and under live in a household with low income, as do 14.2% of those 18-64 years old, and 10.5% of those aged 65 and older.<sup>136</sup>

Risk factors for low income in PEC include:

 10.7% of adults in PEC do *not* have a high school diploma or post-secondary education.<sup>137</sup> Less educated workers are among those at most risk.

 PEC has higher rates of part-year, part-time employment: 51% in PEC compared to 48% in Ontario.<sup>138</sup> Low-income workers with precarious employment are less likely to have paid sick leave.

 20% of PEC workers are employed in food services, accommodation and retail sales<sup>139</sup> –sectors with the lowest average weekly earnings<sup>140</sup> and greatest employment impact from COVID-19.

 10.5% of families have a single parent (7.9% female parent, 2.7% male parent).<sup>141</sup>

Although CERB payments of \$2,000 per month (March to October 2020) may have temporarily delayed the financial pain, people living on low income are in a worse economic situation due to the pandemic.

🔔 Low-income workers are more vulnerable to **unemployment** and have more **barriers** to employment.

🔔 Almost half of renters in PEC already spend more than 30% of household income on **housing**<sup>142</sup> which exceeds the CMHC affordability threshold. Rents in PEC increased 31% in the last year. See [Housing p. 34](#)

🔔 **Food prices** are forecast to increase 3 to 5% in 2021.<sup>143</sup>

The individual monthly \$2,000 CERB payments were significantly higher than the \$1,169 that people receive from the *Ontario Disability Support Program* and the \$733 that people receive from *Ontario Works* – underscoring the difficulty of living on existing social assistance programs.

Health Providers Against Poverty <sup>144</sup>



Canada's **income gap is growing** rapidly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many low-wage jobs were lost and there has been a surge in high-wage jobs.

A Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce report states that the jobs lost in 2020 were primarily among workers who earned below-average wages, while high-wage earners gained almost 350,000 jobs over the past year.<sup>145</sup>

*"Inequality makes for unhealthier societies. Life expectancy, literacy, infant mortality, imprisonment, murder rates, obesity, teen birthrates, mental illness (including addiction), social mobility, trust — all get worse across the entire income spectrum when the gap between rich and poor widens."*

Richard Wilkinson, Public Health Researcher<sup>147</sup>



Additionally, Canadian households built up \$160 billion in savings during the first three-quarters of 2020. This is due to a large increase in government support and a decline in spending. While one-in-five (18%) Canadians are better off, nearly two-in-five (39%) are worse off, according to the 2020 BDO Affordability Index.<sup>146</sup>

As the crisis continues, the pandemic is **deepening societal inequalities**, widening the gap between those who are doing well and those who are not. Low-income workers are being driven further into poverty and insecurity.

## Empowerment and capacity building are vital.

More than ever, empowerment and capacity building initiatives in Prince Edward County are vital to **help vulnerable people achieve their full economic potential**.

Residents are enabled through programs in the form of income tax clinics, benefits screening, skills upgrading, educational attainment, employment connections and legal assistance.

Canadians report that their **personal finances are the leading cause of stress in their lives**. 41% of Canadians cite money as their biggest problem and this number rises to 60% for Canadians with low incomes. Prosper Canada<sup>148</sup>

Investment in these programs has a multiplier effect when residents are productive and spend money in this community. **Prince Edward Learning Centre** and **Prince Edward Community Care for Seniors** host free CRA Income Tax and benefit screening programs for low-income County residents. Their programs have been adapted with COVID-19 protocols, and volunteers are vetted and trained by Canada Revenue Agency.

The impact can be life-changing, for example:

In 2020, the **Prince Edward Learning Centre** (PELC) tax volunteers **helped 344 low-income people** file their taxes.

This work generated \$1,038,743 in refunds and ancillary benefits – **an average of \$3,020 per person**.

When these benefits help to build a financial bridge, more people can pay rent, buy food and other goods.

### INCOME TAX CLINICS BENEFITS SCREENING

- Assistance with tax filing for low-income residents
- Access to benefits and support programs

[princeedwardlearningcentre.com](http://princeedwardlearningcentre.com)  
[communitycareforseniors.org](http://communitycareforseniors.org)

### SKILLS UPGRADING

- Upgrade literacy and essential skills
- Finish High School
- Prepare for work

[princeedwardlearningcentre.com](http://princeedwardlearningcentre.com)

### EMPLOYMENT

- Employment counselling
- Workplace training
- Job connections

[careeredge.on.ca](http://careeredge.on.ca)

### LEGAL ADVOCACY

Access to justice through legal services, advocacy, and information for people living on a low income or in poverty

[communitylegalcentre.ca](http://communitylegalcentre.ca)

## 4. Physical distancing measures are changing the world of work.

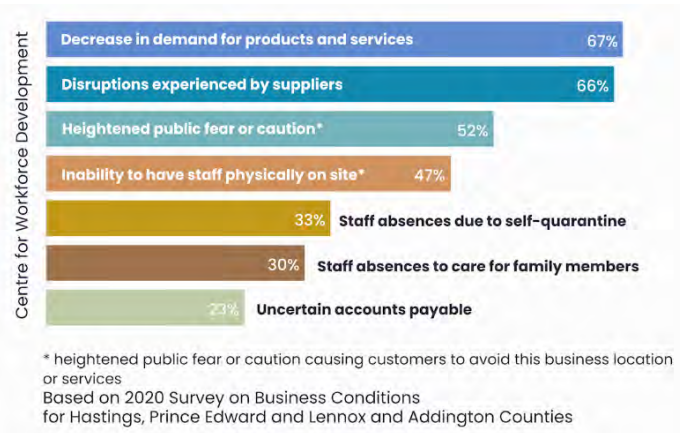
Small businesses are facing unprecedented challenges to their survival, including reduced revenue, poor liquidity, disrupted supply chains, inflexible fixed costs, increased need for technology, navigating emergency government supports and retaining employees. Ontario Chamber of Commerce<sup>149</sup>

A Centre for Workforce Development 2020 Survey on Business Conditions provided insights about the impacts of COVID-19 on regional businesses.<sup>150</sup>

*“The way that our local business owners have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic has been truly inspiring. The creative adaptations and partnerships that have developed from this enormously challenging situation have been outstanding. The fact that we’ve actually had new businesses open in this time speaks to the entrepreneurial spirit of the community.”*

Sarah Doiron, Picton BIA

### Impacts of COVID-19 on businesses

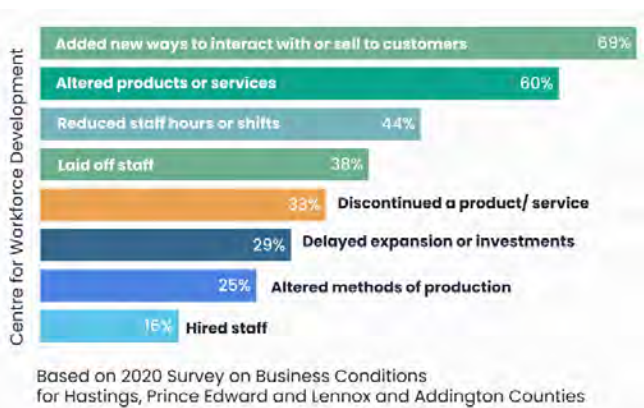


Retail trade, accommodation and food services are the primary sectors that responded to the surveys. These industries are the most economically impacted by COVID-19.

The top challenges of decreased demand, supply disruptions and heightened public fear contributed to revenue declines.

These industries also incurred additional expenses for cleaning, PPE, training and scheduling.<sup>151</sup>

### Changes and adaptations



Government mandated physical distancing measures forced businesses to change their operations. Many have found new ways to work with customers with less in-person interaction. Examples include online ordering, curbside pickup, deliveries and virtual communications. These changes required some alterations to products and services.

Staffing has been affected, with some businesses being forced to make hard decisions including laying off staff.<sup>152</sup>

### Leveraging Technology

COVID-19 has fast-tracked the adoption of digital technologies. With physical venues temporarily closed in compliance with stay-at-home orders, an online presence is now essential for businesses.



Based on Centre for Workforce 2020 Survey on Business Conditions<sup>153</sup>

Local businesses are using technology for sales transactions and to stay connected with their customers.

## PEC Business Response

PEC business organizations, with support from the County of Prince Edward, responded quickly to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy.<sup>154</sup>



Residents were inspired to support local businesses thanks to a *Support Local* campaign created by:

- Community Services, Initiatives & Programs Department of The County of Prince Edward
- Prince Edward County Chamber of Commerce
- Picton Business Improvement Association
- Bloomfield Area Business Association
- Wellington District Business Association
- Consecon Ratepayers Association.

County business associations and the Chamber of Commerce fostered ongoing collaboration with:

- monthly video meetings
- a virtual County Canada Day Celebration organized by the Picton and Wellington Canada Day committees
- a Holiday Support Local year-end campaign.



*Digital Main Street* grants, led by Picton BIA, supported 100+ PEC businesses that adopted new digital technologies.

Spearheaded by Picton BIA, the *Keep it in The County Pass* encourages local shopping through the use of mobile technology.

Qualifying businesses listed in the *SupportLocalPEC.ca* directory are automatically included.



Supported by local organizations, *ShiftYourself* is a new web platform that is enabling small business employers to secure flexible coverage and helping people to find work. This Prince Edward County collaborative scheduling project is re-imagining staffing while COVID-19 shutdowns continue to be unpredictable. Project partners include Launch Lab The Innovation Centre, a provincially funded network of resources for entrepreneurs and Invest Ottawa.<sup>155</sup>

**Will the pandemic help more businesses see the advantages of collaboration?**



# FOOD INSECURITY

**Sustainable Development Goals:** Zero Hunger (SDG 2) and No Poverty (SDG 1)

1. COVID-19 increased the risk of food insecurity.
2. The community quickly mobilized to support food access.
3. Food insecurity is being addressed through an empowerment model.

## 1. COVID-19 increased the risk of food insecurity.

The food insecurity rate among Canadians has grown **from 10.5% in 2017/18 to 14.6% during COVID-19**. A survey conducted by Statistics Canada in May 2020 revealed that almost one in seven (14.6%) of Canadians live in a household where there was food insecurity in the past 30 days.<sup>156</sup>

**In PEC, that translates to approximately 3,700 people.**<sup>157</sup>

**1 in 7** Canadians is experiencing food insecurity during COVID-19



**Food insecurity** is the inadequate or insecure access to healthy, nutritious food due to financial constraints.<sup>158</sup>

**Most food-insecure households are in the workforce.** 65% reported their main source of income as wages or salaries from employment.<sup>159</sup>

Feed Ontario lists the top three drivers of food bank usage as **growth in precarious employment, lack of affordable housing and insufficient social assistance programs.**<sup>160</sup>

For the most vulnerable populations in rural areas, **lack of access to public transportation** is a barrier to accessing food, especially for seniors and young families.<sup>161</sup>

**Food insecurity** is most often found in households with **low incomes**. Especially vulnerable are households that **rent their accommodations** and those that are **led by female single parents**. As a household's income declines, the risk of food insecurity increases.<sup>162</sup>

Job losses during COVID-19 were primarily in low-paying, part-time work, **disproportionately impacting families from low socioeconomic backgrounds.**<sup>163</sup>

**Surging food prices** are amplifying the risk of food insecurity. The pandemic is affecting the entire agri-food chain from farmgate to consumers. Food costs are forecast to increase 3 to 5% in 2021.<sup>164</sup> Higher food costs have a **greater impact on households with low incomes and on people who live with fixed incomes.**

**Lack of adequate nutritious food is a far-reaching problem.** Poor diet quality and emotional strain negatively impact physical, mental and social health.<sup>165</sup>

## COVID-19 also impacts PEC food insecurity activities.

- Community meals are cancelled due to social distancing restrictions.
- School closures and COVID-19 safety protocols interrupt traditional *Food for Learning* programs.
- **Food to Share** meal preparation is intermittently limited by municipal kitchen closures.
- Food banks deal with limited volunteers per shift, packing food boxes, more client deliveries and increasing food prices.



## 2. The community quickly mobilized to support food access.

With existing food insecurity programs impacted by COVID-19, PEC organizations **reinvented essential services** and **created new initiatives** to deal with changing needs.



- **NEW** The **Food Collective** organizes a *County Food Depot* to address an increase in demand for supplementary food.
- **NEW** The **PEC Help Line** refers callers to community food and support programs.
- **NEW** The **ROC Neighbourhood Outreach Response** delivers food to youth member families.
- *Food for Learning* provides grocery gift cards for in-class and virtual students. *Food for Home* helps students and families who need additional food support during non-school times.
- **The StoreHouse Foodbank Wellington** increases senior meals from 90 to 155 per week.
- **NEW** *Table Settings* prepares meals during the summer for migrant farm workers.
- **NEW** **PEC Fresh** Food Market opens during COVID-19 and provides subsidized fresh food.
- **Food to Share** cooks at the **County Food Hub** and other kitchens and prepares 180 meals a week for three local food banks, ROC and Kate's Rest.
- *Meals on Wheels* program expands to provide 130+ hot and frozen meal deliveries each week to seniors.
- More volunteer drivers are recruited to deliver meals, food boxes and groceries.
- Food outlets offer more options for online ordering and payment.

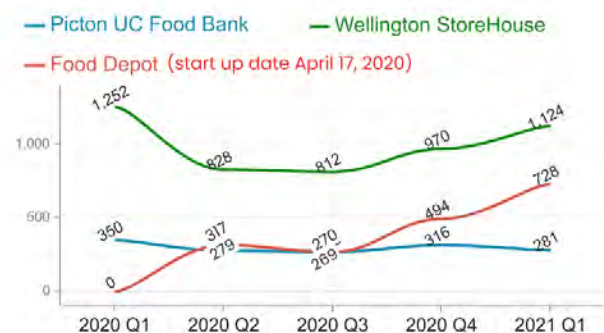
### Increased government benefits affected the need for supplementary food.

Many urban food banks were overwhelmed during the first COVID-19 wave. Quinte Regional Food Share Shelter and PEC food banks experienced low to normal demand due to increased government financial support and the supplementary food available at the **County Food Depot**. Demand increased once the **Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)** and seasonal work came to an end in October.

By the first quarter of 2021, **food orders increased by 33%** over the same period in 2020. Amongst *County Food Depot* clients, approximately 60% did not previously access food banks.

Statistics Canada indicates that larger families are more affected.<sup>166</sup> In PEC, the needs trend toward single person and small households, seniors and people who live with disabilities or health issues.

PEC Food Banks and Food Depot  
Number of food orders distributed



## 3. Food insecurity is being addressed through an empowerment model.



**The Food Collective**, comprised of 25 local organizations, continues to work toward the vision that ...

“every person in PEC has the means to consistently access and consume nutritious, affordable food.”

Food Collective projects and research are focused on **transitioning from a charity to an empowerment model**. This includes advocating for system and policy changes that **address the root causes of food insecurity**.

**Most food insecure households do *not* access food banks.**

Only about 25% of food insecure households use food banks.<sup>167</sup>

Food Banks Canada surveys reveal that stigma is associated with charity and accessing food banks is a last resort. People will compromise on food to meet other financial obligations such as rent.<sup>168</sup>

# HOUSING – RENTING and OWNING

**Sustainable Development Goal:** Sustainable Community (SDG 11)



1. COVID-19 has intensified housing instability.
2. There is increased urgency for affordable housing options.
3. Home prices are pushed higher by demand from outside Prince Edward County.

## 1. COVID-19 has intensified housing instability.

Job and income losses during the pandemic are making it difficult to manage household costs. Workers with less secure, lower-paying jobs are more affected by COVID-19 employment losses.<sup>169</sup>

Loss of income puts homeowners at risk of defaulting on mortgage payments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 760,000 Canadians have either **deferred or skipped a mortgage payment**.

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, September 2020<sup>170</sup>

### The risk of homelessness is increasing.

It is estimated that 6,000+ tenants across Ontario could face **evictions during the pandemic** after the eviction moratorium was lifted in early August.<sup>171</sup>

*“More people are reaching out for support from eviction prevention and rental assistance programs, with many in **danger of becoming homeless**. Social assistance rates far below the poverty line and lack of technology access are barriers for the most vulnerable people who need to reach legal resources and communicate during COVID-19.”*

Lisa Turik, **Community Advocacy and Legal Centre**

**Prince Edward-Lennox & Addington (PELA) Social Services** also works with individuals to help prevent homelessness.

**Rural homelessness is not always evident.** It can include living in tents or vehicles, “couch-surfing”, or staying in shelters. A 2018 survey on homelessness in PEC found that 32 people were considered homeless or precariously housed, including at least 8 children. The top reasons listed by those surveyed were conflict/abuse with partner or parent/guardian, inability to pay rent or mortgage, or job loss.<sup>172</sup>

The pandemic is also making people’s lives more difficult with closures of public facilities and washrooms. **Kate’s Rest** on Big Island is a property that provides permanent housing for people who are at risk of homelessness.<sup>173</sup>

**Before COVID-19, three in 10 (29%) of Canadians were already insolvent and could not pay all of their monthly bills.** (Ipsos January 2020)<sup>174</sup>



**22.8%** of PEC households were financially burdened before COVID-19, **spending more than 30% \*of household income** on housing (\*Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation affordability threshold).

**48.9%** of **rented households** in PEC were most affected by lack of affordability.<sup>175</sup>



Rapidly rising rental prices are magnifying **affordability issues**.

**Rent has increased 31%** in the last year. Anyone who earns less than \$20 an hour can’t afford to live in PEC.

As of February 2021, the average market rent for a 2 Bedroom unit in PEC is \$1,623 (\$1,295 to \$1,941), based on 60 local listings of 12-month occupancy rentals. Ancillary costs for utilities are approximately 15%, increasing shelter costs by \$243 per month.

C.M. Dowdall, **PEC Affordable Housing Corporation**

The province announced a **rent freeze** for 2021.<sup>176</sup>





## 2. There is increased urgency for affordable housing options.

The housing shortage is worsening, especially for those seeking affordable long-term rental accommodations.

There are 242 Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI), Affordable Units and Market Rent Units in Picton and Wellington as well as 42 +/- Rent Supplement Units.<sup>177</sup>

The PELA Social Services **waiting list for an RGI unit is 4 to 6 years**, with applications increasing 16% in the past year (from 630 to 731 applicants).<sup>178</sup>



PEC has the **4<sup>th</sup> lowest rental vacancy rate** in Ontario at .4% and the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest in rural Ontario. The competition is short-term vacation rentals.<sup>179</sup>

Since October 2018, PEC short-term accommodations are now regulated and limited to a maximum 15% of the homes in an area.<sup>180</sup>

The **PEC labour market** is also affected.

A 2019 *Prince Edward County Attainable Housing Report* indicates that 27% of businesses surveyed were unable to hire potential employees due to a lack of affordable housing options in the region.<sup>181</sup>

### New Affordable Housing Developments are in the works.

In 2020, the vision to increase the supply of affordable housing in PEC moved closer to reality.

**PEC Affordable Housing Corporation** has several housing sites in various stages of negotiation and development. Affordability, our aging population, accessibility and increasing the number of smaller and single-person households are priorities. Rents will be at least 20% below the average market rate prescribed by CMHC.<sup>182</sup>

- **Wellington arena lands: 36** rental affordable housing units by late 2022.
- **Centrally located** in the County: **20** affordable housing rental units by late 2022.
- **Three other projects** are undergoing viability assessments: If approved, **100** units of affordable housing will become available in more rural areas.
- The potential development of up to **40 tiny homes in the north end** of the County, with rental or purchase options.

These affordable housing projects include a requirement for local employment and apprenticeships.

In addition, the **LoveSong Seniors Co-Housing and Community Hub Group** took over the former Pinecrest Memorial Elementary School property in October 2020. The group aims to create a multi-phase seniors co-housing project.<sup>183</sup>



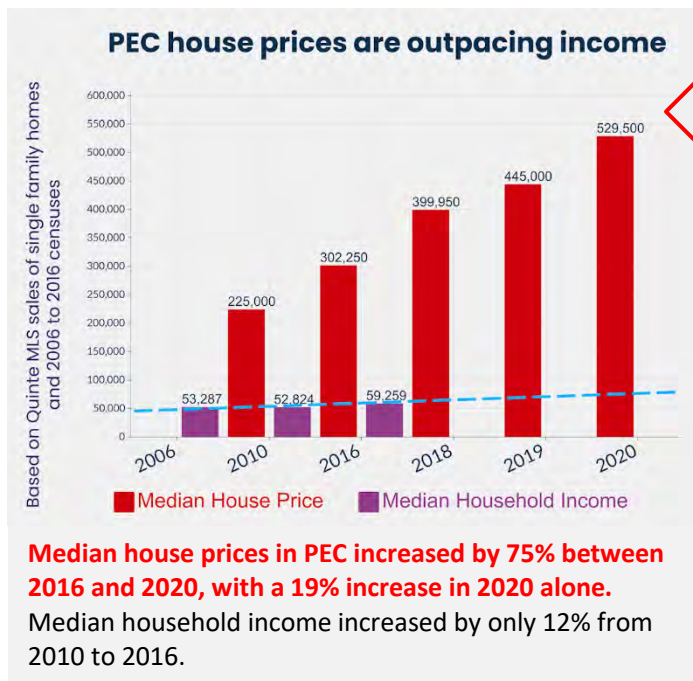
### 3. Home prices are pushed higher by demand from outside Prince Edward County.

With COVID-19 shutdowns, Prince Edward County’s housing market felt the impact of **increased homeowner demand**. People from areas surrounding Toronto are purchasing local properties where they can **work remotely** and **live more affordably**.

*“With the new normal of working remotely using virtual technology, people outside of PEC are selling and moving here. About 75% of people relocating to PEC are from GTA. This is **increasing prices and reducing availability**. Turnover in migration is more evident as retirees from outside PEC move into the County but there is also an outflow of those who feel they **can’t afford to live in PEC**”* C.M. Dowdall, PEC Affordable Housing Corporation



**Low borrowing costs** intended to stimulate the locked-down economy,<sup>184</sup> also increased property buyers’ budgets. As **many invest in real estate**, the most vulnerable find themselves **struggling to make rent and mortgage payments**.



House prices<sup>185</sup> are growing faster than household income,<sup>186</sup> making home ownership inaccessible to most potential first-time home buyers who work in PEC.



2020 Median Sale Price of MLS® Residential Dwellings

The PEC median house price is nearly 40% higher than in neighbouring regions.<sup>187</sup>

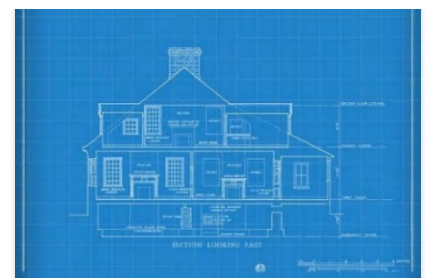
### Will unaffordable housing displace younger generations of PEC residents?

#### The new PEC Official Plan must balance diverse interests.

The popularity of the County is generating more interest and pressure from developers. The municipal Planning Department is currently processing subdivision applications representing more than 1,500 units in subdivision applications.

After 10+ years of public consultation and drafting, the new official plan takes into account diverse views regarding protection of the environment and agricultural land, while allowing for adequate housing development.<sup>188</sup>

*A new official plan “will ensure a more predictable planning process and better align our infrastructure with new development. Part of that new development must include affordable housing – one of council’s key priorities.”*  
Mayor Steve Ferguson, The County of Prince Edward



# EDUCATION

**Sustainable Development Goal:** Quality Education (SDG 4)

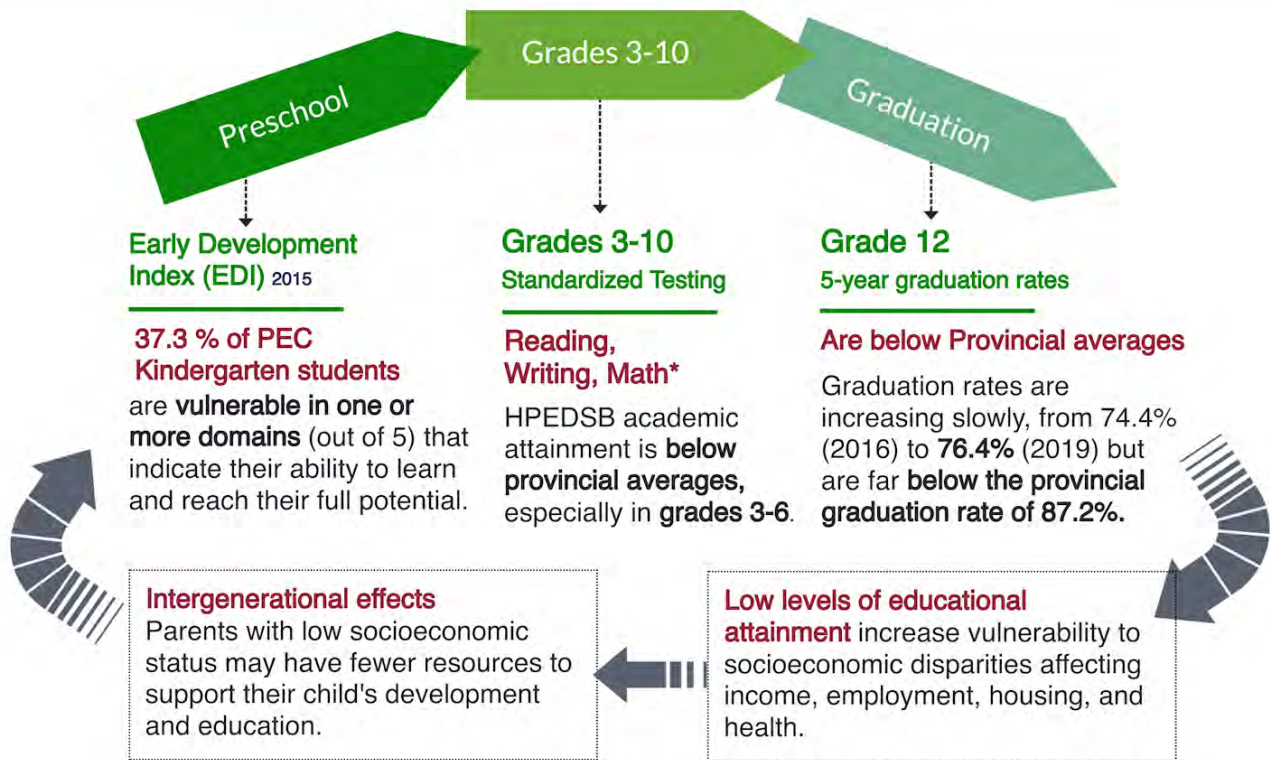
1. Existing academic challenges are intensified by COVID-19 disruptions.
2. K to 12 education supports students in a pandemic environment.
3. Post-secondary education leverages technology and hybrid learning.

## 1. Existing academic challenges are intensified by COVID-19 disruptions.

The year has been particularly difficult for students, parents and educators. Schools were shuttered for several months in spring 2020 and then for two weeks in January 2021. The **disruptions** are intensifying **academic challenges** and the **shift to remote learning** has not served everyone equally. Compared to Ontario, HPE students historically have lower academic attainment.

*“Graduation attainment and the removal of barriers to students working towards the achievement of their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), remains the greatest single area of academic improvement the HPEDSB is working towards.”*  
Sean Monteith, Director of Education,  
Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board

# EDUCATION MATTERS *for life*



\*Reading, writing and particularly math scores for Grades 3 to 6 students are lower than and have declined in tandem with the Province.

Sources: HPE District School Board 2019 EQAO results <sup>189</sup> • HPE Public Health Early Development Index <sup>190</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education Gr. 12 Graduation Rates <sup>191</sup> • The Canadian Facts - Education <sup>192</sup>



## 2. K to 12 education supports students in a pandemic environment.



The sudden shift to **online learning** was challenging for educational institutions and many students, especially for low income or rural students with **limited internet access**. Teachers had to quickly adapt courses and teaching methods, requiring a steep learning curve. **Social isolation**, **lack of structure** and **uncertainty** were difficult adjustments for students. Parents were unexpectedly forced to juggle full-time childcare, work, supporting online learning and keeping their families safe. This was especially problematic for single parents and those who could not work from home.

*“With all our students spending half of the last year learning from home remotely and virtually and in ways we have never had to prepare for, the impact on students and staff alike will be long lasting.”*

Sean Monteith, HPEDSB Director of Education



HPEDSB families with **limited technology** were loaned 1,100+ Chromebooks / laptops and 300 internet access **devices** to ensure equitable access to online classes. Students without consistent access to virtual resources are more likely to become disengaged with school and to not graduate.<sup>193</sup>



**Enhanced mental health supports** at HPEDSB supported elementary and secondary students through the COVID-19 school closures and during the summer.<sup>194</sup>



**Innovative 2020 graduation ceremonies** included “drive bys”, physically distant presentations and photo opportunities.<sup>195</sup>



The **reopening of schools** in the fall brought different challenges. Anxiety was high around returning to classrooms after coronavirus lockdown. COVID-19 safety and health training was provided to school staff. School environments and scheduling were rearranged to allow physical distancing. Public health nurses and COVID-19 health teams were dedicated to schools.<sup>196</sup>

Some parents opted for full-time online classes (teacher-led) or home learning (parent-led). For families with financial resources, learning pods or tutors provided alternatives to larger classrooms.



In an Angus Reid youth survey<sup>197</sup>, students indicated their experiences during school closures. **Challenges of online learning** included lack of access to peer / school / academic / extracurricular resources, motivation, time management and online settings.

*“Kids ran into technology fatigue, doing school work and communicating with friends online. Virtual communications were not the best method for some youth.”* ROC Recreation Outreach Centre



Students at Sophiasburgh Central School learn physical distancing by doing the “zombie walk”.

Two **HPEDSB virtual schools** (K to 8 and 9 to 12) were created in August. Initially enrolment was 1,750 but this number jumped to 2,500 as of October 1 and required reorganized staffing. Virtual classes are a mixture of teacher led and flexible online learning.<sup>198</sup>

## Learning and support continued in many forms.

When Essential Skills classrooms at **Prince Edward Learning Centre** closed and moved to online learning, **not all students had virtual access or suitable technology devices**. Internet access is not affordable for everyone and is unreliable in rural areas; libraries that provided free Wi-Fi were closed; some used prepaid cell phone cards for communication. For **parents with young children at home, COVID-19 lockdown increased barriers to education**.

Through the *Emergency COVID-19 Fund* Prince Edward Learning Centre was able to provide 20 computers and internet access to their students.

**ROC** staff are concerned about the impact that the pandemic has and will continue to have on young people, especially **disengaged and marginalized youth**.



ROC provides **educational and mental health support** to youth members and in 2020 they also delivered laptops, cell phones, art and education supplies along with more than 1,250 food and hygiene kits across PEC.

**County Kids Read** provides **free books and learning packages to vulnerable at-risk children**. COVID-19 interrupted their distribution through the schools and *Babies and Beyond* (a program for teenage moms). To compensate they successfully delivered 560 books per month through food banks and the *County Food Depot*.

One of the most important predictors of graduating from high school is reading proficiently by the end of third grade. The Children's Reading Foundation<sup>199</sup>

In 2020, the **HUB Child & Family Centre** *EarlyON* program included more **virtual programming and outdoor play groups**. Staff created interactive online activities and reached out through social media. For example, caregivers could pick up a craft kit so children could participate remotely.

**Prince Edward County Library** **online educational services expanded** to include storytimes, coding, 3D modeling and design, literacy and other custom programs using video sessions to support teachers, home-educators and students.



In April 2020 the **Prince Edward Learning Centre** **Youth Employment Skills Strategy** program INSPIRE required a huge effort to convert the two-week in-class program to online learning. The program has 20 weeks of **combined pre-employment training and job placement**. Although employers taking on these cohorts during COVID-19 was a concern, 90% of students found placements.



When the **County Museums** summer camps were cancelled, they made **takeaway kits** for kids to work on at home. In November and December 2020, staff reached out to schools with **online history programs** that engaged more than 300 students.



**Greater Than County Youth Collective** consists of 28 organizations and involves 57 individuals who have partnered to form a collective impact group.

Their goal is to raise the High School graduation rate in Prince Edward County to parity with the provincial average by 2026.

During the pandemic, a *Community Action Research* survey was conducted to determine how COVID-19 has affected PEC youth.

### 3. Post-secondary education leverages technology and hybrid learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the physical closure of colleges and universities across Canada, resulting in a shift to increased online classes and many students moving out of residence or student housing. **Academic life was disrupted** to some degree for the majority of post-secondary students. 57% of participants reported that their academic work placements or courses were either delayed, postponed or cancelled.

The disconnection from campus activities and student resources was challenging enough, but small living quarters and the inability to travel home contributed to a **greater sense of isolation** for many students. **Financial concerns and uncertainties about the job market** were added stressors for students who are carrying a debt load. Post-secondary institution budgets were impacted by the **decrease in tuition revenue** from international students and students delaying education plans.<sup>200</sup>



**Loyalist College** offered students **applied experiences in 65% of their programs** with remote learning and creative scheduling of small classes, labs and workshops. The number of people on campus was limited and safety protocols were put in place for residences.

The greatest challenges have been in programs such as culinary and media where the College has highly specialized equipment and learning environments that cannot be replicated at home. For experiential portions, a **hybrid model** works well. The same students work together in small cohorts and theoretical components are delivered remotely.

The College's **Student Success team** reconfigured its services online to provide easy access to academic, social and personal student supports. As well, \$1M was allocated to provide students with financial assistance required as a result of the pandemic.

An online store was launched for the Loyalist **Student Food Cupboard** where students can place orders for free healthy, non-perishable food, school supplies and personal hygiene items.



During the pandemic, Loyalist launched and developed more than 20 **new programs** such as *Emergency Management and Incident Response*, an accelerated *Personal Support Worker* program and relaunched the *Media* and *Massage Therapy* programs.

*"I'm proud of the role we've played in supporting students and staff and in supporting programs. Post COVID it will be a different route than pre-March 2020. Loyalist will continue leveraging technology for hybrid learning which may provide for a better work-life balance for some students."*

Kathleen Bazkur, Dean, School of Media, Business and Access



# TRANSPORTATION

**Sustainable Development Goal:** Sustainable Community (SDG 11)

1. County Transit public transportation launched in 2020.
2. COVID-19 interrupts volunteer driving services.
3. The Cycling and Transportation Master Plan will provide more transportation options.

## 1. County Transit public transportation launched in 2020.

In August 2020, after years of fundraising and community efforts, **County Transit** non-profit public transportation was launched. During this three-year pilot project, routes are being adjusted based on uptake and feedback.



The April 1, 2020 launch date was delayed due to COVID-19. COVID-19 protocols ensure safety of passengers and drivers, but capacity is limited during the pandemic.

The **PEC Transportation Collective** *Getting Around* group of 20 partner organizations works toward an integrated affordable and sustainable transit system in PEC.


Lack of **public transportation** has been cited as an obstacle to accessing fresh food, obtaining employment, completing education and maintaining connections with the community.

**County Transit** provides on-demand and fixed routes with 4 return trips to Belleville from Monday to Friday. On average, 70 trips are made per month and approximately 90% of trips are work related. Passengers can transfer at the Belleville Transit Station for connections to Loyalist College, VIA Rail, Belleville General Hospital and shopping.


**Quinte Transit** specialized service remained in full operation throughout 2020. Due to COVID-19, ridership (5,135 trips) is down approximately 55% from 2019.

**Prince Edward District Women's Institute** continued their financial support of accessible transportation in 2020, despite cancellation of their biggest fundraiser, the *Art & Crafts Festival*.

## 2. COVID-19 interrupts volunteer driving services.

COVID interrupts the **volunteer driver service** that provides escorted travel services through **Volunteer and Information Quinte** and **Prince Edward County Community Care for Seniors Association**. However,  delivery of groceries and essential supplies continues for seniors and people confined at home, and local taxis are providing transportation with COVID-19 protocols in place. **Quinte Access** specialized transit assists seniors with out-of-area medical appointments in Kingston and Peterborough.

## 3. The Cycling and Transportation Master Plan will provide more transportation options.

The **Cycling and Transportation Master Plan**, to be completed in 2021,  "imagines a future for Prince Edward County where trails and cycling routes are well connected, and where cycling provides a viable transportation option for residents and visitors alike".

Public consultation continued online in 2020 at [haveyoursay.thecounty.ca](https://haveyoursay.thecounty.ca).



Photo by Regional Tourism Organization 9

# ENVIRONMENT

**Sustainable Development Goals:** Sustainable Community (SDG 11), Climate Action (SDG 13) and Clean Water (SDG 6)

1. Pandemic lockdowns drew visitors to PEC's outdoor spaces.
2. COVID-19 environmental impacts were mixed.
3. Plans to protect Prince Edward County's natural heritage ramp up.

## 1. Pandemic lockdowns drew visitors to PEC's outdoor spaces.



In summer 2020, PEC beaches and natural areas were overwhelmed with an unprecedented number of visitors due to the closure of many Ontario beaches and parks.



Overcrowding at beaches and trash left by visitors was an ongoing problem. (Photo by Friends of Sandbanks)

In August, safety concerns, garbage dumping and non-permitted activities led to the closure of Little Bluff Conservation Area for the remainder of 2020.



**Provincial Parks** are implementing new tools to manage day visitor use volumes at Sandbanks and North Beach.

**Quinte Conservation** is making physical improvements to Little Bluff Conservation Area and is introducing dedicated staffing and other measures to manage visitor flow.

**The County of Prince Edward** is undertaking an action plan to manage visitor use at Wellington Beach and municipally maintained public spaces.<sup>201</sup>

**Can a balance be found between protecting fragile areas and making them publicly accessible?**

## 2. COVID-19 environmental impacts were mixed.



Reliance on **single-use plastics increased**. PPE

disposable plastic gloves and masks, take-out food containers and non-reusable grocery bags contributed to the increased use of plastics.<sup>202</sup>



Some **provincial water quality monitoring network activities did not happen** because Ministry labs were closed; there was no place to test water samples.<sup>203</sup>



**Air pollution decreased** from vehicles, air travel and industrial activities by as much as 60% in early 2020 in many parts of the world as compared to the same time last year.<sup>204</sup>

## 3. Plans to protect Prince Edward County's natural heritage ramp up.

With **pressure to develop lands** greater than ever, Council adopted a new Official Plan in February 2021. The County's Official Plan guides how the municipality will grow and develop over the next 25 years. Section 2.3.b) notes:



*All new development will be compatible with its surrounding context, champion the protection of rural habitats and the natural environment and, where possible, reduce the climate impact of our decisions.*<sup>205</sup>

Ontario began the process to designate Ostrander Point Crown Land Block and Point Petre Provincial Wildlife Area, two **ecologically significant areas** within the Prince Edward County South Shore Important Bird and Biodiversity Area, as a Conservation Reserve. More biodiverse acreage was added for protection through the efforts of the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC). Since 1977, NCC has been involved with the protection of more than 2,400 acres of biodiverse land in Prince Edward County.<sup>206</sup>

# CRISIS as a CATALYST for CHANGE

1. Accelerated technology adoption enables more online services.
2. Community leaders respond with adaptability and innovation.
3. Perceptions, beliefs and social norms are shifting.
4. The crisis presents opportunities to make lasting progress.

In the emerging “new normal”, opportunities to change for the better are already being realized. The pandemic is transforming the economy, health care, workplaces, education, travel and recreation, societal norms and more. No one has been untouched, and no one should be left behind as we tackle the impacts.

## 1. Accelerated technology adoption enables more online services.

### Digitization



- ↑ More sectors have adopted digital and remote processes.
- ↑ People are embracing e-commerce, contactless payments, teleworking, videoconferencing, telemedicine, remote education and automation.
  - ↑ Technical literacy and capacity are increasing.
- ↑ Technology is helping to reduce the spread of the coronavirus while enabling service delivery to continue.
- ↓ The digital divide becomes more apparent during the pandemic.

### Remote Work



- ↑ Remote work increased to 40% in late March 2020, up from 13% in 2018.<sup>207</sup>
  - ◇ Four in ten Canadians work in jobs that can be done remotely.<sup>208</sup>
- ↑ There is potential to reduce air pollution as fewer people commute to work.
- ↑ More options for remote work and services help to remove barriers for people with disabilities or challenges such as childcare, transportation or distance.
  - ↓ Commercial office space and the "ecosystem" of local businesses that rely on occupied office buildings are negatively affected.
- ◇ The flexibility to work from any location is inspiring people to relocate from heavily populated urban areas to rural areas.

### Shopping



- ↑ New and diverse audiences are now using e-commerce.
- ↑ Lockdowns gave rise to local shopping, as many consumers switched to shopping and using services within their local area.
- ↑ Community supported agriculture has flourished as consumers are buying and having local fresh produce delivered.
  - ◇ The new ways of shopping — from online ordering to delivery and curbside pickup — are not going away.



## 2. Community leaders continue to respond with adaptability and innovation.

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### Innovation



- ↑ Operational processes and programs were quickly adapted. New and innovative approaches resulted, many of which will become permanent.
- ↑ Food Insecurity: A large scale coordinated effort mitigated the impact.
- ↑ Housing: A number of affordable housing projects are now underway.
- ↑ Environment and Tourism: Protection and management plans ramped up.
  - ↑ Public transit launched despite the challenges of the pandemic.

## 3. Perceptions, beliefs and social norms are shifting.

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### Perceptions



- ↑ Personal safety and social connections are taking higher priority.
  - ↑ Awareness of discrimination and inequities is heightened.
- ↑ Essential and frontline workers are more recognized and valued.
- ↑ The stigma around mental health is decreasing as more people face challenges to their mental health during COVID-19.
  - ↑ Engagement with nature and green spaces has been highlighted.
- ↓ A new social normal may be devoid of touch such as handshakes and hugs.

### Collaboration



- ↑ Many barriers have been broken – politics have been minimized to efficiently deliver financial relief to Canadians; ministries are less siloed; business and service organizations are sharing resources and working toward common goals.
- ↑ Healthcare and research communities are working together to develop and administer safe and effective vaccines within an unprecedented time frame.

## 4. The crisis presents opportunities to make lasting progress.

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The COVID-19 pandemic and measures to mitigate its spread have caused widespread disruption and hardship. Widespread momentum to “build back better” includes economic recovery and attending to long-standing social challenges such as inequality, mental health and inclusion. Crisis presents a unique opportunity for renewal. It is possible to emerge in a better place.

*“Our procedures will never be the same; neither will our approach to programs and services. We are forever changed and mostly for the better where the change has brought progress and innovation.”*

Debbie MacDonald Moynes,  
**Prince Edward Community Care for Seniors**

*“This has been an opportunity to learn and improve. Services are being reshaped and codesigned with people who are receiving them.”*

Susan Treverton,  
**Community Living Prince Edward**

## Conclusion

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COVID-19 continues to challenge and change everything. As this report is published, 23,002 Canadians have died as a result of COVID-19.<sup>209</sup> According to current statistics, 25,464 people live in Prince Edward County. The number of deaths across Canada is almost equivalent to the entire population of our community.

Within Hastings Prince Edward, 6 lives have been lost and 514 cases of COVID-19 have been recorded. The promising news is that more than one year into the pandemic, people are now receiving vaccines. To date, 28,473 vaccines have been administered and 1,946 people are now fully vaccinated in our community.<sup>210</sup>

As the pandemic disrupts lives and livelihoods, the social impact continues. Throughout Prince Edward County, individuals, groups and organizations are responding with resilience, creativity and reinvention. While many aspects of life may normalize once “herd immunity” is reached, we are all heading towards a very different future than what we envisioned at the start of 2020.

The accelerated adoption of virtual technologies will permanently affect many aspects of our lives – working, shopping, health care, education, communication, entertainment and more.

Measures undertaken to successfully navigate today’s challenging business environment may open up new opportunities. The delivery of community programs and services has been reinvented. Ultimately, change is strengthening our community’s resilience in the face of adversity.

While the pandemic affects everyone, the health, social and economic impacts of the virus are being borne disproportionately by vulnerable populations. COVID-19 has revealed and magnified these inequities, demanding a new response from policymakers.

New ways of defining our individual and collective goals, objectives and values will help us discover and drive solutions to “build back better”. As we continue to learn from this unprecedented experience, thoughtful planning can help our community prepare for the challenges that lie ahead.

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Linda Conley	Lynda Mungall
Brian Ford, Treasurer	Braydon Scully
Ellis Greenberg	Tony Walton



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The County of Prince Edward

The County Foundation

*The Emergency Community Support Fund*





## Endnotes

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