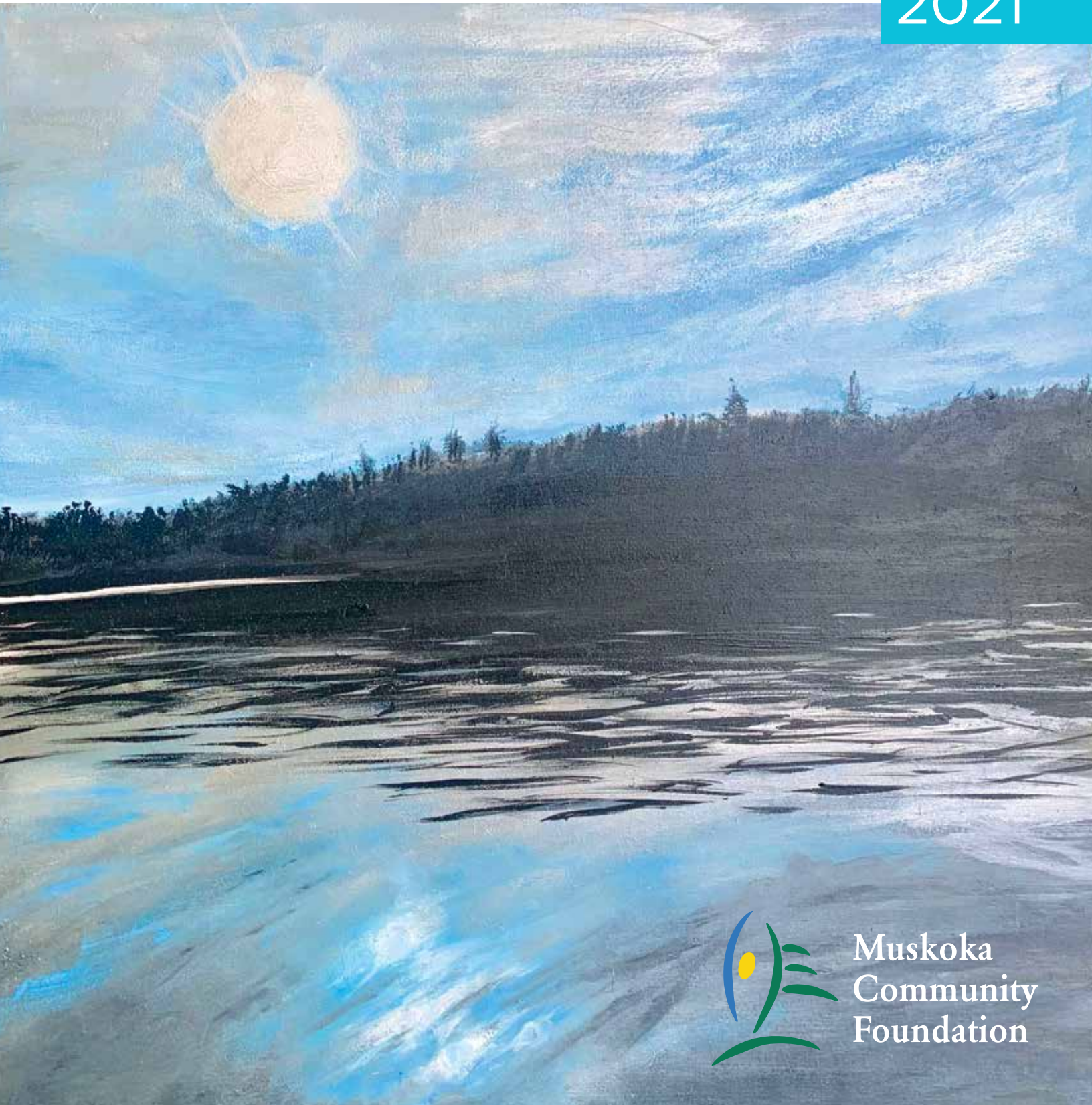




MUSKOKA
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

VitalSigns®

2021



Muskoka
Community
Foundation

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Photo credit: Front cover painting by Eva White

Chair’s Message – Bill Fee



At the Muskoka Community Foundation, we consider ourselves to be a charity for charities. We help our local charities do their work. We are pleased to present this Vital Signs® Report which is coming out three years after our first. It presents refined and updated information, in a useable format, enabling many local organizations to improve their responses to the needs in our area. On behalf of the Board of the Muskoka Community Foundation, I hope this report inspires your work, or informs your perception of Muskoka and the surrounding areas.

Executive Director’s Message – Lynn DeCaro



The Muskoka Community Foundation is pleased to present the 2021 Muskoka Vital Signs® Report. The follow up to our 2018 report was originally planned for 2020. Like the rest of the world we were required to take pause and turn our attention to supporting each other through these unprecedented times. We hope that you will find this report an informative and inspiring snapshot of what is happening in Muskoka that will spark conversation, action and ways to engage with local issues. We have been humbled to learn that local schools, service clubs and charities continue to use the 2018 report. We are honored to present an updated version to capture the changes in our community and carry on important discussions around some of the most pressing issues. The 2021 Muskoka Vital Signs® Report provides updated local data where possible. We are also extremely thankful to the community partners who took time out of their busy days to provide Muskoka specific data during these challenging times. Please share the 2021 Muskoka Vital Signs® Report widely with your friends, family colleagues and community. Together we will continue to build a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and caring Muskoka.

Land Acknowledgement

The Muskoka Community Foundation would like to acknowledge that the District Municipality of Muskoka sits on land that has been inhabited by Indigenous Peoples from the beginning. In particular we acknowledge the traditional territories of the Ojibway, the Chippewa, the Algonquin and the Odawa. Today Muskoka is home to three sovereign nations: Wahta Mohawks First Nations, Moose Deer Point First Nation and the Moon River Métis. These lands are covered by the Williams Treaty of 1923, the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 and the J. Collins land purchase of 1785.

What is a Vital Signs® Report

Vital Signs® is a community check-up that Community Foundations across Canada participate in to measure the health and vitality of our communities. Vital Signs® Reports identify significant trends in a range of sectors and areas that are critical to quality of life and maintaining smart and caring communities. Vital Signs® is coordinated nationally by the Community Foundations of Canada. Special thanks to the Toronto Foundation for developing and sharing the Vital Signs® concept.

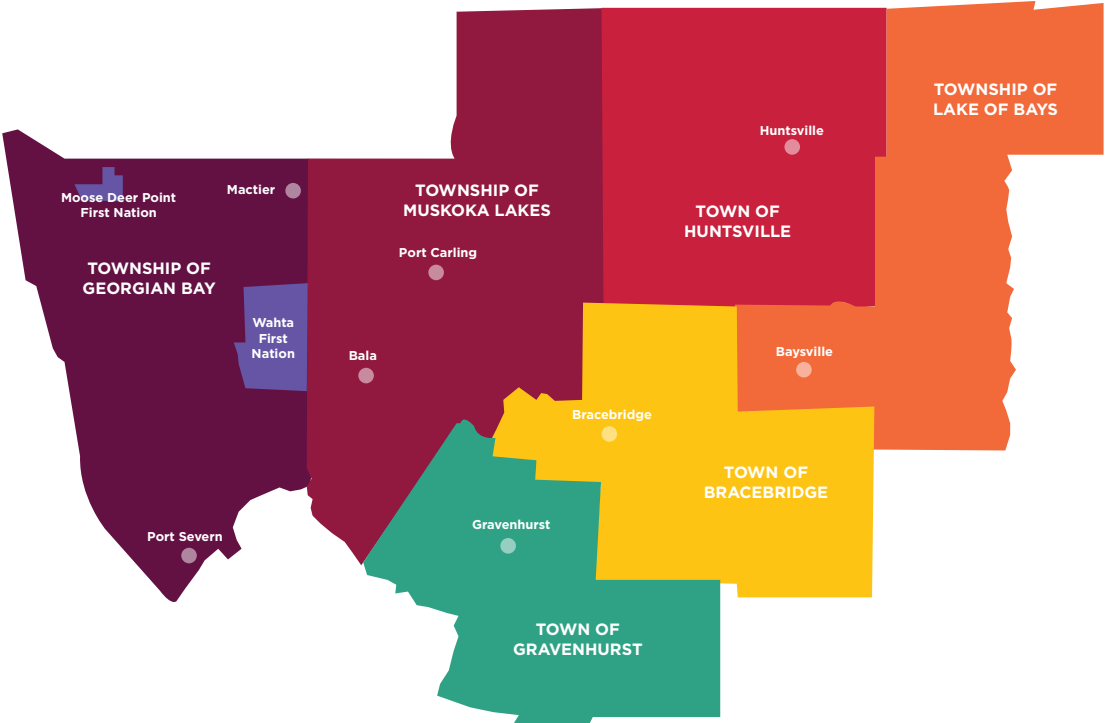
For more information visit VitalSignsCanada.ca.
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Methodology

Due to the impacts of COVID 19 the Muskoka Community Foundation did not hold any community stakeholder conversations leading up to the 2021 Muskoka Vital Signs® Report. The Foundation has collected updated data in collaboration with multiple local sources. Where possible the report will identify trends emerging since the original 2018 report.

Our Region

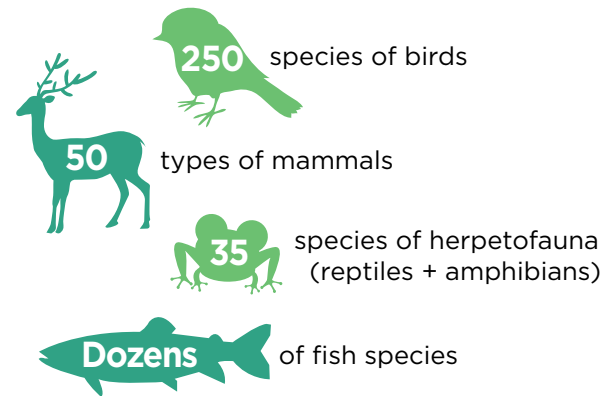
Area	Permanent Population	Seasonal Population
4,765 sq km	2016 = 60,599 Estimated 2020 = 63,286 <small>(Source: 2019 District of Muskoka Growth Strategy)</small>	2016 = 81,907 Projected 2046 = 93,640 <small>(Source: 2019 District of Muskoka Growth Strategy)</small>





Muskoka encompasses more than 1,000 lakes and is home to 10 provincial parks including Hardy Lake, Arrowhead and Six Mile Lake, as well as more than 10 conservation areas that include the Torrance Barrens Conservation and Dark Sky Reserve. Georgian Bay Islands National Park is Muskoka's only National Park, and has more reptiles and amphibious species, including the threatened Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, than any other national park in Canada.

Muskoka is home to:



Impacts of Climate Change in Muskoka

Muskoka's economies are based on a healthy and diverse ecosystem. Indicators, such as the number of days with ice cover on lakes, indicate a warming trend. According to ice-cover data provided by the Dorset Environmental Science Centre, today there is approximately 3 weeks less of ice cover on our lakes than there was 45 years ago (140 days vs 121 days). Climate change will affect not only the environment but also the weather, economy, jobs and health.

According to the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit climate change can affect our health in a number of ways. These changes might include, more summer heat warnings, heat-related illness and hospitalizations, more extreme storms, injuries and community-wide emergencies, poor air quality possibly leading to increased respiratory and cardiovascular illness, more exposure to UV radiation and an increase in the presence and numbers of vectors that carry diseases like West Nile Virus and Lyme disease. In addition, changing weather will also affect water and food safety, and the ability to grow food.



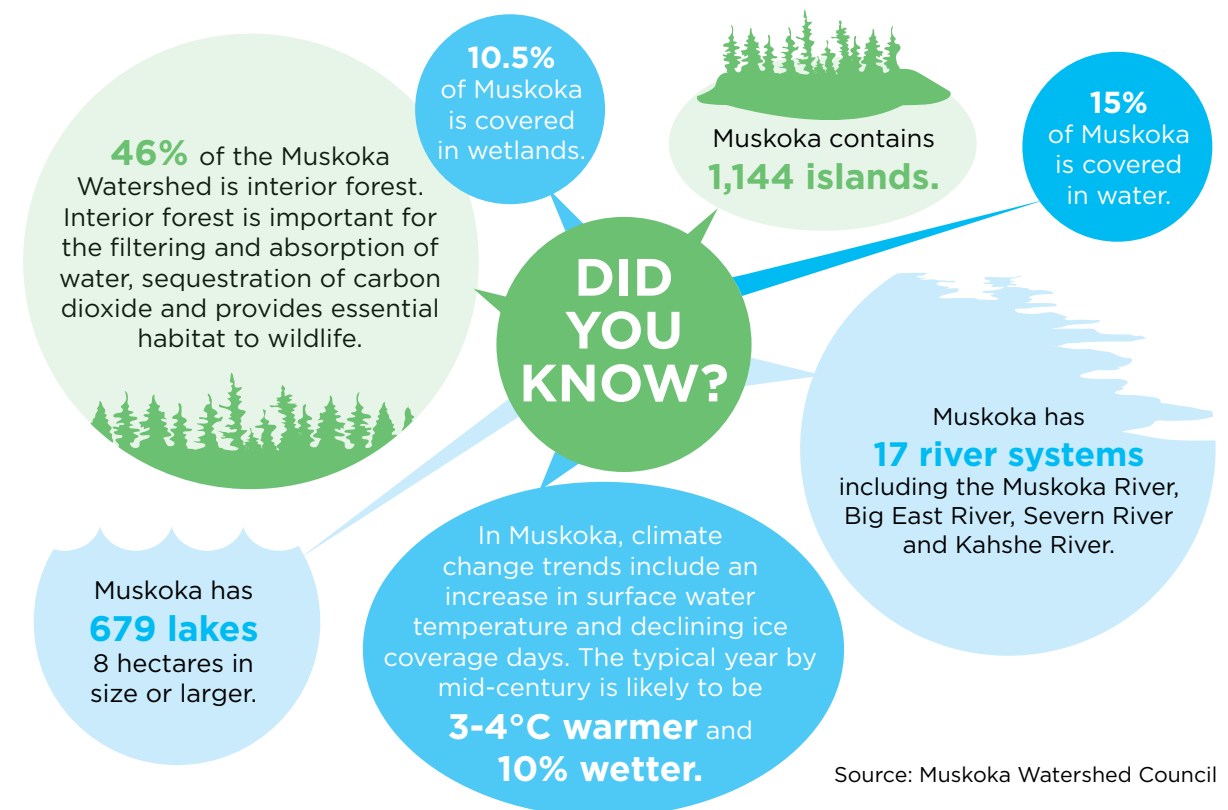
46 species at risk in Muskoka
 Include: Monarch Butterfly | Snapping Turtles | Eastern Small Footed Bat

According to classifications provided by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

7 of Ontario's **24 invasive species** of concern can be found in Muskoka
 Include: Spiny Water Flea | Phragmites | Japanese Knotweed

Impact of COVID 19 on the Environment

Many environmental monitoring programs and stewardship initiatives were cancelled in 2020 due to COVID 19 causing a gap in knowledge. An example of this is a number of cyanobacterial blooms on lakes not typically susceptible to them. An absence of water quality data limited the ability to assess what was occurring in local lakes and waterways.



Muskoka Solutions

Muskoka has often been identified as one of the best places to visit in Canada and also as one of the top vacation spots in the world. In addition to its natural beauty, Muskoka offers many cultural and recreational opportunities for visitors and residents with a strong connection to Muskoka's environment.

Raising awareness of environmental issues and engaging a broad range of stakeholders has been identified as a means of balancing tensions between economic growth and environmental stewardship. Currently, the District of Muskoka, with the support of a grant from the provincial government, is overseeing multiple projects that will inform long-term watershed planning. These initiatives will bring a science-based perspective to environmental and land-use management in the Muskoka River watershed, while considering social, environmental, and economic factors.

In addition, the District of Muskoka is implementing A New Leaf Muskoka Climate Strategy as well as partnering with area Municipalities to assess climate change risks in Muskoka and develop a regional climate adaptation plan to address them.

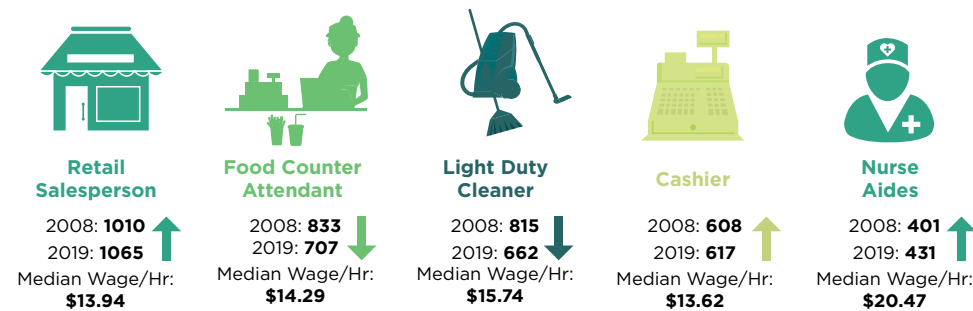
The 2018 Muskoka Vital Signs® Report noted that while there were growing sectors in Muskoka's economy, such as tourism, construction, public services and real estate, a labour shortage persisted. Identified barriers to labour participation include lack of affordable housing, transportation and access to childcare. While many community agencies and partners have been working on finding sustainable solutions to these barriers, the impact of COVID 19 has presented new challenges. Where possible we have strived to present updated information although you will find some information sourced from the most recent census information that was released in 2016.

Living Wage in Muskoka

A living wage is the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic needs and participate in their community. This is not to be confused with the legislated minimum wage. The numbers below reflect the hourly amount required to earn a living wage in Muskoka



Largest Occupations in Muskoka (2019 Data)



Impacts of COVID 19 on Muskoka's Economy Recorded in 2020

The volume of economic activity in Muskoka was **down by 4.5%**

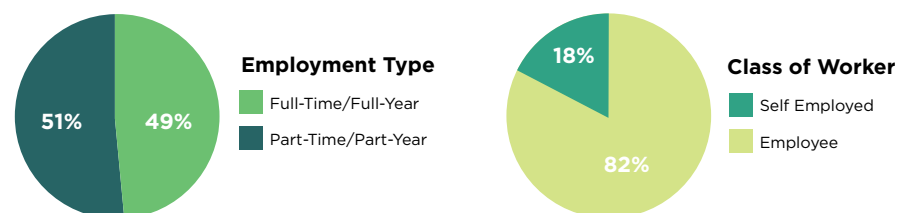
Worst effected industries
Included: tourism, education (nurseries & day care), transportation and warehousing

25% of Muskoka businesses reported losing staff due to COVID-19

12.1% Unemployment Rate highest rate in the last 14 years with the greatest impact effecting women, young people and precarious workers

It is important to note that not all businesses and not all employees were affected by COVID 19. Many individuals were able to work from home or were employed in businesses that were deemed as essential services.

Type of Employment: Muskoka 2015



In the 2018 report the **median employment income was \$26.918** – 21% lower than the Ontario median income (2016 Census). As noted on the previous page since 2015 there has been a 17% increase in the amount required to earn a living wage in Muskoka and meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, transportation, medical expenses etc. This trend is concerning as the cost of living in out pacing the hourly wage earnings placing increased stressors on households.

Ontario Works Social Assistance Stats

Source: The District of Muskoka

Households Receiving Ontario Works Social Assistance

2017	2020
849 Households	710 Households

From 2017 to 2020 there was a decrease of 16.4% in the number of households receiving Ontario Works social assistance.

Average # of Applications to Ontario Works Social Assistance

2019	2020
106/month	61/month

In 2020, the average number of applications for provincial Ontario Works benefits fell to 61 applications per month (42% decrease).

The above decreases need to be understood in the context of the impacts of COVID 19 and the introduction of the Federal Canadian Recovery Benefits. The chart below demonstrates the amount that a single person receives per month to pay for basic needs such as food, shelter, activities of daily living and family needs. It is important to note that an individual receiving the Canada Recovery Benefit received \$1267/month more than when receiving Ontario Works benefits and \$831/month more than when receiving Ontario Disability Support benefits.

	Ontario Works	Ontario Disability Support	Canada Recovery Benefits
Single Individual	\$733	\$1,169	\$2,000

Average Length of Time for Receiving Ontario Works Social Assistance

2017	2020
27 months	33 months

There was a 22.2% increase from 2017 to 2020 in the length of time households have received Ontario Works assistance.

Ontario Disability Support Program

2017	2020
1726	1841

From 2017 to 2020 there was an in .67% increase in the number of households in Muskoka are receiving Ontario Disability Support Program assistance.

Average Number of Households with Employment Earnings While on Ontario Works Social Assistance

	2018-2019	2020
Households	141	85
Average Monthly Earnings	\$845-\$897	\$896

There was a 40% decrease in the number of households with employment earnings from 2018 to 2020.

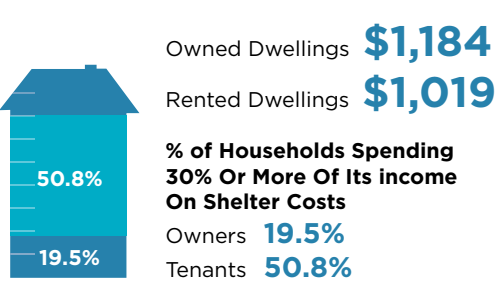
Impacts of COVID 19

When asked if the COVID 19 pandemic made it more difficult to pay rent/mortgages, bills, debts, buy enough food or quality food 23-34% of 408 Muskoka respondents ages 18+ identified that it was much harder.

Source: COVID 19 Local Impact Survey
March - April 2021 Simcoe Muskoka
District Health Unit

Access to secure and sustainable housing impacts an individual's overall health, the ability to secure sustainable employment and Muskoka's economic health. A concerning trend is that the cost of living is outpacing household income. This coupled with the increase of non-waterfront home prices and the lack of affordable housing stock continues to place enormous pressure on individual households.

Average Monthly Shelter Costs in Muskoka



Source: Statistics Canada 2016

The District of Muskoka owns, manages or subsidizes



The District of Muskoka owns and manages



In 2020 there was an average of **586 Applicants** on the waitlist.

As of October 2021 there were **634 Applicants** on the waitlist.

Housing Continuum

Source: The District of Muskoka



Over a three-day period in October 2021 the District of Muskoka conducted a Homeless Enumeration to determine who in Muskoka is experiencing homelessness.

Unsheltered	Emergency Shelter	Hidden Homeless	Temporary Accommodation
Living outside, in vehicles, tents, or camps	Staying in temporary shelters or motels	Staying with friends or family, couch surfing	Staying in a correctional institution, hospital or residential treatment without having a home to go to when discharged.

Of the individuals surveyed (150 people + 11 children) in the **2021 Homeless Enumeration**

- 53%** of respondents reported experiencing chronic homelessness
- 9%** of respondents reported staying in make-shift shelters, vehicles or places not meant for human habitation
- 40%** of respondents reported having a chronic/acute medical condition
- 67%** of respondents reported having a mental health concern/illness

It is important to note that the number of people enumerated represent a small subset of those served through the District of Muskoka housing and homelessness prevention program.

Source: District of Muskoka Homeless Enumeration and By-Name List Update



- Adequate
- Appropriate
- Affordable
- Accessible
- Available

Attainable Housing

The more pieces that are missing, the more unstable housing becomes.

Housing Solutions in Muskoka

Habitat for Humanity in Muskoka is a non-profit organization working to break the cycle of poverty by building homes and promoting affordable home ownership, through the mobilization of volunteers and community partners. Since 2002 Habitat for Humanity has built 24 homes throughout Muskoka, with 2 more builds planned for 2022. One of the most recent builds is a 4 plex that adds affordable units to the rental supply in Muskoka.

Home For Good (HFG) is a newly completed transitional housing program for young adults aged 16-24 consisting of 12 bachelor apartments for 12 young adults. The program was created to provide safe and secure housing for young adults while they focus on setting and meeting personal development goals, gaining life skills as well as developing the skills and knowledge required to successfully move from homelessness to safe, stable and independent living.

The District of Muskoka oversees numerous housing programs supporting people in a variety of ways. The Gateway Muskoka program provides eligible families and individuals with down payment assistance for purchasing a home.

Since 2014, the **Muskoka Affordable Housing Initiative Program (MAHIP)** has committed to providing incentives for 96 new affordable units totaling \$3.1 million, as well as over 300 monthly rent supplements to make local rents more affordable.

The Muskoka Housing Task Force (MHTF) was created in 2019. The MHTF is a grass-roots, diverse and action-oriented "task force" to identify and promote strategies and opportunities for a range of housing options across Muskoka. Through the efforts of the working groups, the MHTF has proposed several possible solutions/projects to help address housing needs across the District of Muskoka.

Average price of non-waterfront homes in Muskoka

2016 \$244,377 | 2017 \$388,454 | 2018 \$362,233
2019 \$385,770 | 2020 \$464,868 | 2021 (Jan-Sept) \$630,125

All information displayed is believed to be accurate but it is not guaranteed and should be independently verified. No warranties or representations are made of any kind. Statistics provided by The Lakelands Association of REALTORS® are approximate.

Impact of COVID 19 on Housing

Since the beginning of COVID 19 many communities, including Muskoka, have noted an increase in development activity and interest in relocating to areas outside of the GTA. As noted above there has been a significant increase in the local real estate market since the beginning of 2020. This increase in housing has exacerbated the housing crisis in Muskoka and has limited the possibility of home ownership for many.

According to Food Banks Canada 1 in 8 households rely on the support of food banks and food programs. The organization's 2021 Food Bank – Hunger Count report noted an initial decrease in food bank usage in 2020, however, this decrease began shifting in June of 2020 coinciding with the end of the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and ongoing public health measures. The combined impacts of low incomes and the rising cost of living have contributed to an increased demand on food banks. Below you will find information on how food banks and food programs are supporting those experiencing food insecurity in Muskoka.

Food Security

According to the 2019 Nutritious Food Basket Survey a family of four in Muskoka using the Canadian Food Guide spends the following amount on groceries.

	2017	2018	2019
Weekly	\$211.72	\$210.00	\$224.07
Annual	\$11,001.00	\$10,920.00	\$11,651.64



Source: Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
Due to the impacts of COVID-19 the Nutritious Food Basket Survey was unable to be conducted in 2020 and 2021.

Muskoka Examples

Gravenhurst Against Poverty (G.A.P.)

G.A.P. is a group of volunteers offering help to their neighbours in the Gravenhurst area who are experiencing difficulty. The organization provides a number of programs including support to those facing food scarcity.

	2019/20	2020/21
Families Fed	73	236
Seniors Fed	31	94
Children Fed	30	211

Table Soup Kitchen Foundation

Located in Huntsville the Table Soup Kitchen Foundation offers a number of programs including a food bank and a soup kitchen.



2020 Stats

Guest Visits in 2020 • **5,446**
Average Weekly Food Baskets • **134**
Total Food Baskets in 2020 • **6,951**
Total Meals Served • **7,363**

Salvation Army Bracebridge

The Salvation Army in Bracebridge offers a variety of programming that includes a food bank in Bracebridge and Gravenhurst.

2020 Stats	Households Served	Food Distributed
Bracebridge	428	62,459 lbs
Gravenhurst	389	59,635 lbs

Manna Food Bank

The Manna Food Bank is located in Bracebridge and supports individuals across Muskoka.

Households Served
2020 503 Households
2021 (Jan 1 to Oct 31) 401 Households

Many food banks in Muskoka participate in food rescue programs accepting food items from local grocery stores, restaurants, camps and resorts. This results in items not normally available at food banks to be shared with clients such as fresh produce and non-food items. It is important to note that food banks in Muskoka have their own methods for recording statistics related to use.

Food Banks in Muskoka

Huntsville

- Table Soup Kitchen Foundation
- Salvation Army Huntsville

Bracebridge

- Manna Food Bank
- Salvation Army Bracebridge

Gravenhurst

- G.A.P
- Salvation Army Gravenhurst

Muskoka Lakes

- West Muskoka Food Bank

Lake of Bays

- Dwight Winter Pantry
- Winter Pantry Dorset and Baysville

Georgian Bay Township

- Port Severn Food Bank
- MacTier Food Bank



Impacts of COVID 19

Food Banks and food programs in Muskoka were severely impacted as a result of public health measures at a time when individuals and families needed them most. In order to accommodate their clients and neighbours, these organization quickly shifted their delivery methods to meet the needs of those who used their services.

The **Salvation Army in Bracebridge** began booking individual appointments for clients and met them at the front door with their items. This impacted the level of communication and ability to direct clients to available services and resources in the community.

Prior to COVID 19 **G.A.P.** held a weekly supper program. In order to continue serving their neighbours the organization shifted to a meal delivery program and added a weekly food pick up program.

Manna Food Bank faced the unexpected challenge of how to ensure the safety of volunteers and clients while continuing to deliver their programming. Clients were unable to enter the food bank and placed orders online or by phone the day prior to pick up. Volunteers were divided into the pre-order team and the order distribution team.

Often overlooked are the non-food item needs of clients visiting local food banks. During 2020 and 2021 **Pets Too** distributed more than 15,000 pounds of pet food to food banks across Muskoka to help people meet the needs of feeding their pets.

When individuals do not feel welcomed or adequately included in their community they may be at greater risk of being pushed to the margins of society, isolated or socially excluded. A lack of social inclusion can impact both the physical and mental health of community members including their life expectancy.

In 2021 the District of Muskoka released a report titled *Muskoka Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Anti-racism Project: Interim Report on Findings from the Community of Muskoka*. According to the report a majority of survey respondents believed discrimination was a serious issue in Muskoka. The top five perceived reasons for discrimination and/or harassment in Muskoka were skin colour, Indigeneity, sexual orientation/gender identity, low income and disability.

67% of respondents noted that people in Muskoka were not tolerant and accepting enough of people from different cultural backgrounds

53% of respondents believe that discrimination in Muskoka was a problem

37% of respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination in the past five years of living in Muskoka.

In addition, survey respondents who experienced discrimination in Muskoka listed the following locations where discrimination most frequently occurred:

21 % work place **18%** shops and restaurants **17%** outside in public areas **10%** at school

When asked about inclusiveness in Muskoka, diverse individuals were significantly less likely to **agree** with the following statements (when compared to non-diverse respondents):

- I can be my real self here in Muskoka
- When I speak of up my opinions are valued
- I am comfortable talking about my background and cultural experience with others
- I feel included and respected here in Muskoka

This suggests that the feeling of inclusion and belonging is not as common among more diverse members of the community in Muskoka.

To read the report in full visit www.engagemuskoka.ca/idea

Current Initiatives in Muskoka

Muskoka Area Indigenous Leadership Table (MAILT) The MAILT was launched in 2019 as a way to strengthen relations between Muskoka’s municipalities and the Indigenous Nations who have a current or historical tie to the lands that encompass Muskoka. The MAILT meets four to five times a year and includes active participation from the upper tier District Municipality of Muskoka, the six lower tier municipalities, Wahta Mohawks First Nation, Moose Deer Point First Nation, Chippewas of Rama First Nation, the Huron-Wendat Nation and the Moon River Métis Council. There has also been participation from Wasauksing First Nation. Starting in 2022, the Muskoka Indigenous Alliance will also be represented on the MAILT to ensure urban and off-reserve Indigenous voices are brought to the table.

To learn more about current projects, active working groups, accomplishments and to access the Land Acknowledgment Guidelines and Framework visit www.engagemuskoka.ca/MAILT

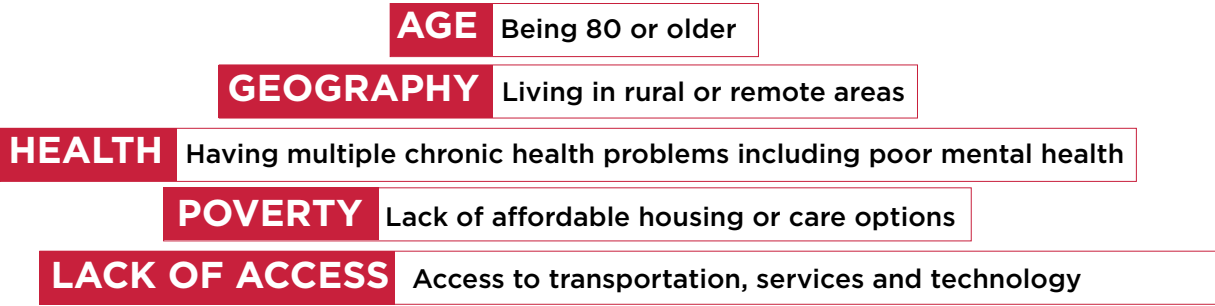
IDEA Advisory Group (IAG) The IAG consists of two key committees. The Champions Committee is the larger of the two committees and is mainly comprised of Muskoka residents with lived experience of discrimination. The second committee, the Partners Committee, includes Muskoka-based agency partners who are committed to enacting the IDEA principles in their own organizations, as well as in the community. www.engagemuskoka.ca/idea

Please note IDEA = Inclusion Diversity Equity and Anti-racism

Older Adults

In 2017 one in five older seniors in Canada reported feeling lonely. A number of factors have been identified as putting older seniors at risk for becoming socially isolated.

Source Government of Canada

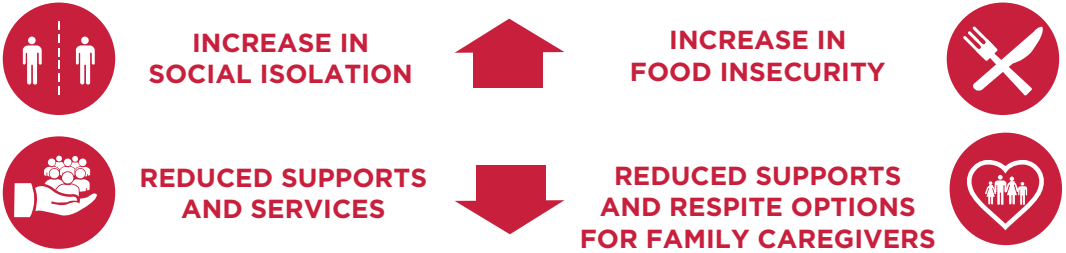


Participating in social activities and feeling connected to community are known to have a positive impact on older seniors. The lack of social connection has been identified as a risk factor for chronic disease, depression, longer stays in hospital and an increase in the likelihood of long-term care admissions. Below are some initiatives that were undertaken in Muskoka to meet the needs of older seniors who were impacted by COVID 19.

- In early 2020 Muskoka Family Health Teams made 749 phone calls to rostered vulnerable seniors to assist patients in making appointments with their primary care providers if needed. 83% of patients participating in the virtual diabetes prevention program indicated they experienced a decrease in social isolation while involved in the program.
- Muskoka Seniors serves 850 clients in north Muskoka. During COVID 19 they transitioned to virtual programs, made regular telephone check-ins, provided support to access services such as vaccine clinics and continued informal check-ins during meals-on-wheels deliveries.
- In 2020 the District of Muskoka Seniors Programs and Services transitioned to virtual supports to keep individuals active and socially engaged and to reduce isolation and loneliness caused by the pandemic. From April 2020 to March 2021 the Seniors Mobile Active Living Centre provided 248 days of programming and supports. To assist older adults in participating in the new programming model, 1:1 technology supports and access to laptops and tablets with enabled Wi-Fi was provided. A telephone based program was developed to support those who preferred a non-screen based approach.

Varying Levels of Ability

Prior to COVID 19 individuals with disabilities were identified as being at a greater risk of experiencing food insecurity, living in poverty and limited social inclusion. Recent research conducted by Professor Anna Przednowek of Nipissing University exploring the impact of COVID 19 on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their support networks in Muskoka, identified the following trends:



Support workers also experienced additional pressures, as they were required to work longer hours and shift to remote or online service delivery.

Health Care professionals in Muskoka strive to meet the unique needs of the local population as well as those visiting the District. Several factors contribute to the overall health of a community. This includes access to health care professionals, as well as appropriate and timely health care interventions. Muskoka's vast geography can pose challenges to delivering effective and sustainable health care. During peak tourist season in July and August, on average there is a 25% increase in calls to the Muskoka Paramedic Services.

Impacts on Health in Muskoka

When discussing health, it is important to consider the multiple factors that impact overall wellness.



Health Care in Muskoka

2 Hospital sites:
Huntsville and Bracebridge

2 Family Health Teams
- Algonquin Family Health Team
- Cottage Country Health Team

52,000 Patients Cared For

50 Primary Care Providers

1 Nurse Practitioner Led Clinic in Huntsville

5 Health Hubs
- Huntsville Summit Centre
- Dorset
- Port Carling
- Whata
- Mobile Hub (serving Port Sydney & Severn Bridge)

2 Walk in Clinics in Bracebridge
for unrostered patients and visitors



Source: Cottage Country
Family Health Team
and Algonquin Family
Health Team

Impacts of COVID 19

Both Family Health Teams provided staffing supports for the COVID 19 assessment and vaccination clinics in Bracebridge and Huntsville and collaborated with Community Paramedicine to establish the COVID@Home monitoring program.

Of the 408 Muskoka respondents surveyed for the COVID 19 Local Impact Survey

55% reported a decrease in physical activity during the pandemic

50% reported a decrease in sleep during the pandemic

30% reported a decrease in healthy eating during the pandemic

Source: Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Mental health impacts each and every one of us and is influenced by a range of factors, including environmental, social and economic conditions. A growing segment of the Muskoka population has experienced income, housing and food insecurity as well as a lack of inclusion. Alongside these factors, COVID 19 has also impacted peoples mental health.

64-74% of Muskoka respondents ages 18+ reported worsening levels of stress, loneliness, anxiety and sense of community belonging during the pandemic.

Source: COVID 19 Local Impact Survey March-April 2021 Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.

Spotlight on Children and Youth Mental Health

Trillium Lakelands District School Board has identified anxiety, depression, family dynamics and school refusal as trends that require involvement of school counsellors.

The *2019 Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-Being* noted that:

27% of children and youth feel **sad or hopelessness** for long periods of time
1 in 3 report symptoms linked to **mental distress**

Family Connexions Simcoe Muskoka is a publicly funded child and youth mental health service provider. The organization offers a number of programs that include counselling walk-in clinics, intensive service worker programs as well as counselling and therapy services. In addition, a registered therapist is attached to each high school in Muskoka. Family Connexions noted that anxiety, depression, loss and grief have been the most common presenting problems among children and youth since 2019.

Number of Clients Served	2019/20	2020/21	April 1, 2020 - October 31, 2021
Counselling Walk-In Clinic	342	318	199
Crisis Response	98	121	75
Counselling and Therapy Services	382	317	222

Challenges of COVID 19

During the early part of the pandemic waitlists for longer term services at **Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions** were between 4 - 8 months. In the later part of 2021 waitlists have decreased with clients typically being seen within 1 month. **Sick Kids** Hospital reported that the shift to providing services virtually resulted in a loss of feeling part of a community among children and youth. Access to nutritious food programs and other critical services were also impacted.



Made In Muskoka Solutions

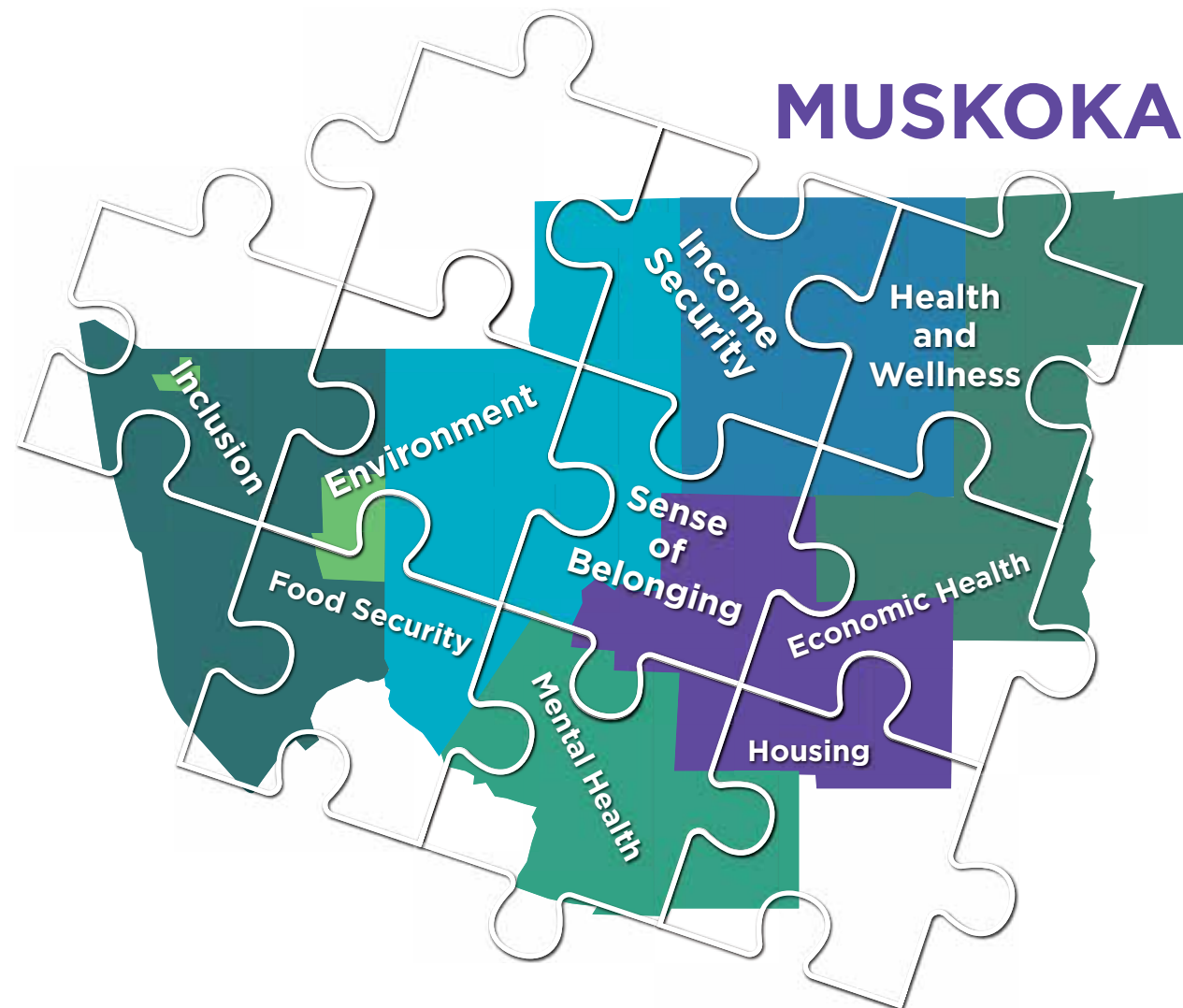
MiND-AID is a needs-based, client-centered, cost-free local service, providing navigation assistance and support to young persons, who are looking for help on their journey to mental wellness. In the first year of operation (Sept. 2020 - Sept. 2021) the organization supported **261 individuals**, made more than **300 referrals** and worked with more than **50 service providers**.

In order to explore each of the topics in greater depth the report has been divided into distinct themes. It is important to note that the issues found in specific themes cannot be truly understood in isolation.

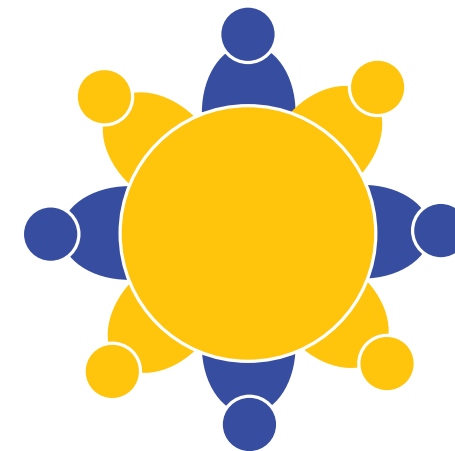
Throughout the report we have tried to highlight where different issues, topics and themes intersect. For example, how the dramatic increase in a living wage (page 6) impacts the ability to secure safe and sustainable housing (page 8) and food security (page 10).

Another example is how feelings of inclusion and a sense of belonging (page 12) can impact our overall health (page 14) and our mental health and well-being (page 15).

These are only a few examples of how each of the topics presented in this report are interconnected. When devising strategies to improve the health and vitality of Muskoka, it will be important to engage with these various complexities.



We acknowledge that this report does not provide a comprehensive overview of all of the issues that need to be considered when assessing the overall health and vitality of the Muskoka community. This report presents a snapshot of Muskoka at a specific point in time, as it relates to the themes highlighted in the report. Rather than presenting the final word, the goal of this report is to begin a dialogue and encourage discussion about what needs to be done to strengthen the well-being of Muskoka.



This is especially important as many of us continue to grapple with the ongoing effects of COVID 19. There are concerns about the lasting impacts of the pandemic placing individuals a greater risk due to continued food scarcity, feelings of isolation and marginalization, the lack of affordable housing, and the increase in the cost of living.

The release of the next report is planned for 2023. The Muskoka Community Foundation will continue to work with community partners to identify Muskoka specific data where possible. We are thankful for the contributions and dedication of local governments, social service agencies, charities, not-for-profits, service clubs and volunteers. When our community was dealing with uncertainty these partners got to work to find innovative ways to provide service and keep us connected.

Thank You!

Muskoka Vital Signs® Partners



Muskoka Vital Signs® Contributors

The District Municipality of Muskoka

Gravenhurst Against Poverty

Manna Food Bank

Salvation Army Bracebridge

Pets Too

Cottage Country Family Health Team

Algonquin Family Health Team

Professor Anna Przednowek, Nipissing University

Trillium Lakelands District School Board

Simcoe Muskoka Family Connexions

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Muskoka Watershed Council

Other Sources

Living Wage Ontario

Statistics Canada – 2015 Census Data

Food Banks Canada – 2021 Food Bank Hunger Count Report

2019 Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being

Sick Kids Hospital – 2021 Response to request for advice on school reopening

Government of Canada - Who's at risk and what can be done about it?
A review of the literature on the social isolation of different groups of seniors



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