



Healthy Weights  
CONNECTION™

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# Site System Scan: Niagara Region, ON

St. Catharines - Thorold - Niagara Falls

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## CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Background .....   | 2  |
| Healthy Weights Connection .....   | 3  |
| Purpose and methodology .....  | 3  |
| St. Catharines community characteristics .....   | 3  |
| Population and demography .....  | 4  |
| Employment and economy .....   | 5  |
| Educational attainment.....  | 5  |
| Geography .....  | 5  |
| Access.....  | 6  |
| Recreational facilities .....  | 6  |
| Thorold community characteristics.....   | 6  |
| Population and demography .....  | 6  |
| Employment and economy .....   | 7  |
| Educational attainment.....  | 8  |
| Geography .....  | 8  |
| Access.....  | 8  |
| Recreational facilities .....  | 8  |
| Niagara Falls community characteristics .....  | 9  |
| Population and demography .....  | 9  |
| Employment and economy .....   | 10 |
| Educational attainment.....  | 10 |
| Geography .....  | 10 |
| Access.....  | 11 |
| Recreational facilities .....  | 11 |
| Aboriginal identity within the Niagara Region .....  | 11 |
| Services and organizations that serve the local Aboriginal population.....                 | 12 |
| Health and health care system .....  | 12 |
| Local health integration network (LHIN).....   | 12 |
| The Southern Ontario Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (SOADI) .....                          | 12 |
| Social services (public and private) .....   | 12 |
| Education .....  | 14 |
| Aboriginal-specific organizations .....  | 14 |
| Missing elements in the community .....  | 15 |
| Components of the public health system and access (with emphasis on healthy weights) ..... | 16 |
| Local health integration networks .....  | 16 |
| The Ontario Health Quality Council – access to health care .....                           | 16 |
| Ontario’s Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy .....                                   | 16 |
| References .....   | 18 |

## TABLES AND FIGURES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: An ecological model for understanding obesity .....                               | 2  |
| Table 1: Population by Aboriginal identity, St. Catharines and Ontario .....                | 4  |
| Table 2: Labour characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, St. Catharines, Ontario.....       | 5  |
| Table 3: Education characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians in St. Catharines, Ontario ..... | 5  |
| Table 4: Population by Aboriginal identity, Thorold and Ontario.....                        | 7  |
| Table 5: Labour characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, Thorold, Ontario .....             | 7  |
| Table 6: Education characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, Thorold, Ontario.....           | 8  |
| Table 7: Population by Aboriginal identity, Niagara Falls and Ontario.....                  | 9  |
| Table 8: Labour characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, Niagara Falls, Ontario .....       | 10 |
| Table 9: Education characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, Niagara Falls, Ontario .....    | 10 |

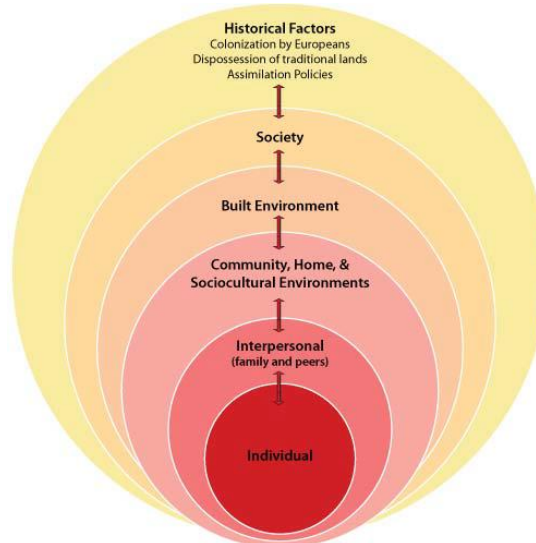
## BACKGROUND

According to the World Health Organization, childhood obesity is among the most serious public health challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>1</sup> In Canada, childhood obesity has been found to significantly increase the risk of various chronic conditions in adults such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, and hypertension,<sup>2</sup> conditions that recently have also been found to appear in children.<sup>3</sup> Among Canadian communities at risk for obesity, Aboriginal children are of particular concern and have largely been neglected. In a study among off-reserve Aboriginal children aged 2 to 17 years, the prevalence of obesity was 2.5 times that of the Canada-wide rate, at 20% versus 8%.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding the causes of childhood obesity is complex as it is shaped by many factors beyond the most proximate cause of excess energy intake relative to energy expended, including genetics, family characteristics, neighbourhood characteristics such as “walkability” and access to recreation, and a number of other social, economic, and behavioural factors. The higher risk of obesity experienced by Aboriginal children overall is certainly related, in part, to greater social and economic risks, such as higher rates of low income, increased likelihood of living in underserved communities, and so on.

However, there is a growing understanding that the “social determinants” of health for Aboriginal Canadians may differ from those that affect the health of non-Aboriginal Canadians.<sup>5</sup> An ecological model (Figure 1) for understanding obesity in children presented by Willows et al. (2012),<sup>6</sup> illustrates the reciprocity among levels that influence active living, the consumption of healthy foods, and weight status, and which recognizes that historical factors encompass and influence all ecological levels.

**Figure 1: An ecological model for understanding obesity in children**



## HEALTHY WEIGHTS CONNECTION

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The Healthy Weights Connection is an initiative that strives to improve existing community resources and access to new resources in order to achieve and maintain healthy weights among Aboriginal children and youth. Through awareness, communication, cooperation and collaboration, Healthy Weights Connection partners:

- Reduce the risk of obesity among Aboriginal children and youth by improving how local health and wellness organizations serve Aboriginal children and families
- Increase culturally-appropriate programming available for Aboriginal children and their families
- Improve relationships and collaboration among all components of the health and social system serving Aboriginal peoples

Healthy Weights Connection began in 2010 in London, Ontario, and the surrounding Oneida, Chippewas of the Thames, and Munsee-Delaware Nations. In 2013, Healthy Weights Connection expanded to the Midland-Penetanguishene area, with support from the Métis Nation of Ontario. Additional sites are yet to be confirmed. Healthy Weights Connection personnel build and nurture partnerships with and between community partners, identify community resources, and provide support for funding applications in order to support efforts to address this important health issue among Aboriginal children.

## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

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The purpose of this system scan is to gain understanding around the broader context in which the Healthy Weights Connection (HWC) initiative will be operating in the Niagara Region, and to provide an objective review of the current and anticipated factors that will help to support and inform the strategic planning process of the HWC initiative. These factors include the demographic, geographic, economic, organizational environments and others in the Niagara Region that may have an impact on the course of action.

An environmental system scan of the mentioned community was sought through several data sources, including:

- The 2011 Census
- The National Household Survey and associated reports
- Review of literature
- Review of municipal websites

The three cities examined in this scan are in the Regional Municipality of Niagara (Niagara Region). The Niagara Region is a peninsula located in Southern Ontario between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, occupying approximately 1,850 km<sup>2</sup>. The region is a major transportation corridor between Canada and the United States.

## ST. CATHARINES COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

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St. Catharines is the largest municipality in the Niagara Region, with approximately one third of the region's population residing there.

## POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

In 2011, St. Catharines had a population of 131,400, a decrease of 0.4% compared to 2006. In comparison, there was a national average population growth of 5.9% over the same time period. In 2011, 1.9% (2,425) of the population of St. Catharines reported having an Aboriginal identity. Of those, 62.5% (1,515) reported being single identity First Nations, 30.5% (740) reported being single identity Métis, and 3.3% (80) reported being single identity Inuit. An additional 3.3% (80) reported other Aboriginal identities, however nobody reported having more than one Aboriginal identity.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1 presents the St. Catharines and overall Ontario population by Aboriginal identity.

**Table 1: Population by Aboriginal identity, St. Catharines, Ontario**

| Population  | St. Catharines |                       |                                     | Ontario    |                       |                                     |
|---|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
|   | Number         | % of total population | % of Aboriginal identity population | Number     | % of total population | % of Aboriginal identity population |
| Total population in private households                            | 128,770        | 100.0                 |                                     | 12,651,790 | 100.0                 |                                     |
| Aboriginal identity population                                    | 2,425          | 1.9                   | 100.0                               | 301,430    | 2.4                   | 100.0                               |
| First Nations single identity                                     | 1,515          | 1.2                   | 62.5                                | 201,100    | 1.6                   | 66.7                                |
| First Nations single identity (Registered or Treaty Indian)       | 580            | 0.5                   | 23.9                                | 125,560    | 1.0                   | 41.7                                |
| First Nations single identity (not a Registered or Treaty Indian) | 940            | 0.7                   | 38.8                                | 75,545     | 0.6                   | 25.1                                |
| Métis single identity   | 740            | 0.6                   | 30.5                                | 86,020     | 0.7                   | 28.5                                |
| Inuit single identity   | 80             | 0.1                   | 3.3                                 | 3,360      | 0.0                   | 1.1                                 |
| Multiple Aboriginal identities                                    | 0              | 0.0                   | 0.0                                 | 2,910      | 0.0                   | 1.0                                 |
| Aboriginal identities not included elsewhere                      | 80             | 0.1                   | 3.3                                 | 8,045      | 0.1                   | 2.7                                 |
| Non-Aboriginal identity population                                | 126,345        | 98.1                  | ...                                 | 12,350,365 | 97.6                  | ...                                 |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile. Statistics Canada, Ottawa.<sup>8</sup>

In St. Catharines, Aboriginal children aged 14 years and under represented 26.2% of the total Aboriginal population and 3.3% of all children in St. Catharines. Non-Aboriginal children aged 14 and under accounted for 14.7% of the non-Aboriginal population.

## EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMY

In St. Catharines, among the total labour force of 67,540 people in 2011, 60,995 people were employed and 6,545 were unemployed. The employment rate was at 55.7%, while the unemployment rate was 9.7% in 2011. Table 2 presents the labour force characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians in St. Catharines.

**Table 2: Labour characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, St. Catharines, Ontario.**

| Labour Force Status  | Characteristics |      |        |
|--|-----------------|------|--------|
|  | Total           | Male | Female |
| Total Aboriginal identity population aged 15 years and over in private households by labour force status | 1,790           | 730  | 1,060  |
| In the labour force  | 1,035           | 420  | 615    |
| Employed   | 885             | 350  | 535    |
| Unemployed   | 150             | 65   | 80     |
| Not in the labour force  | 750             | 315  | 440    |
| Participation rate   | 57.8            | 57.5 | 58.0   |
| Employment rate  | 49.4            | 47.9 | 50.5   |
| Unemployment rate  | 14.5            | 15.5 | 13.0   |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile.<sup>7</sup>

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In 2011, 54.7% of the 91,610 adults aged 25 years and over in St. Catharines had completed some form of postsecondary education, compared to 59.6% at the national level. Of the population aged 25 years and over in St. Catharines, 21.6% had a university certificate or degree. An additional 23.0% had a college diploma and 10.1% had a trades certificate. The share of the adult population that had completed a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment was 27.3%, while 17.9% had completed neither high school nor any postsecondary certificates, diplomas or degrees.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 3: Education characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians in St. Catharines, Ontario**

| Education   | Characteristic |      |        |
|---|----------------|------|--------|
|   | Total          | Male | Female |
| Total Aboriginal identity population aged 15 years and over in private households by highest certificate, diploma or degree | 1,785          | 725  | 1,060  |
| No certificate, diploma or degree   | 645            | 220  | 425    |
| High school diploma or equivalent   | 510            | 230  | 275    |
| Postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree  | 635            | 275  | 360    |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile.<sup>7</sup>

## GEOGRAPHY

The land area of St. Catharines is 96.11 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of approximately 1,367 people per km<sup>2</sup>. This compares to the provincial land area of 908,607.67 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of approximately 14 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

## ACCESS

There are several airports within an hour's drive of St. Catharines: Hamilton International Airport, Toronto's Pearson International Airport, Toronto Island Airport, and Buffalo International Airport. Both VIA Rail and Amtrak provide service to the St. Catharines area.

Major highways link St. Catharines with Toronto and other major cities in Ontario. In addition, highways connect St. Catharines to cities in the United States, including Buffalo and Detroit. The three international bridges that connect the Niagara Region to the United States are the Peace Bridge, Queenston-Lewiston Bridge, and the Rainbow Bridge

## RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The city of St. Catharines has numerous recreational facilities accessible to the community for a variety of healthy recreational activities. A brief review of the city's recreational facilities is presented below. More information can be found at the city's website ([www.stcatharines.ca](http://www.stcatharines.ca)).

### Arenas & Ice Rinks

- There are four arenas with eight ice pads located throughout the city. They are used for figure skating, hockey, lacrosse, and public skating.

### Community Centers

- There are two community centers located in the north end and one in the center of the city.

### Playing Fields

- The fields provide opportunities for sports such as baseball, softball, soccer and football. Kiwanis Field was built to both FIFA soccer and Canadian Football League specifications.

### Parks & Green Spaces

- There are more than 1,000 acres of parks and trails throughout the city. The trails offer a network of more than 90 kilometers.
- There are three unsupervised beaches on the shore of Lake Ontario open to the community: Jones Beach, Lakeside Park Beach, and Municipal Beach.

### Pools & Splash Pads

- The pools provide recreational swimming, swimming lessons and fitness activities. There are also two splash pads located within the city.

## THOROLD COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

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The City of Thorold is a relatively small community close to several larger urban centers, as well as rural areas.

### POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

In 2011, Thorold had a population of 17,931, a decrease of 1.6% from 2006. This compares to the national average population growth of 5.9% over the same time period. In 2011, 2.4% (415) of the population of Thorold had an Aboriginal identity. Of those, 73.5% (305) reported being single identity First Nations and 21.7% (90) being single identity Métis, while single identity Inuit was not reported among those living in the city. Other Aboriginal identities and having more than one Aboriginal identity were not reported among residents of Thorold.<sup>8</sup> Table 4 presents the Thorold and overall Ontario population by Aboriginal identity.

**Table 4: Population by Aboriginal identity, Thorold and Ontario**

| Population  | Thorold |                       |                                     | Ontario    |                       |                                     |
|---|---------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
|   | Number  | % of total population | % of Aboriginal identity population | Number     | % of total population | % of Aboriginal identity population |
| Total population in private households                            | 17,545  | 100.0                 |                                     | 12,651,790 | 100.0                 |                                     |
| Aboriginal identity population                                    | 415     | 2.4                   | 100.0                               | 301,430    | 2.4                   | 100.0                               |
| First Nations single identity                                     | 305     | 1.7                   | 73.5                                | 201,100    | 1.6                   | 66.7                                |
| First Nations single identity (Registered or Treaty Indian)       | 155     | 0.9                   | 37.3                                | 125,560    | 1.0                   | 41.7                                |
| First Nations single identity (not a Registered or Treaty Indian) | 150     | 0.9                   | 36.1                                | 75,545     | 0.6                   | 25.1                                |
| Métis single identity   | 90      | 0.5                   | 21.7                                | 86,020     | 0.7                   | 28.5                                |
| Inuit single identity   | 0       | 0.0                   | 0.0                                 | 3,360      | 0.0                   | 1.1                                 |
| Multiple Aboriginal identities                                    | 0       | 0.0                   | 0.0                                 | 2,910      | 0.0                   | 1.0                                 |
| Aboriginal identities not included elsewhere                      | 0       | 0.0                   | 0.0                                 | 8,045      | 0.1                   | 2.7                                 |
| Non-Aboriginal identity population                                | 17,130  | 97.6                  | ...                                 | 12,350,365 | 97.6                  | ...                                 |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile.<sup>8</sup>

In Thorold, Aboriginal children aged 14 and under represented 34.9% of the total Aboriginal population and 5.1% of all children in Thorold. Non-Aboriginal children aged 14 and under accounted for 15.6% of the non-Aboriginal population.

#### EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMY

In Thorold, among the total labour force of 9,460 people in 2011, 8,625 people were employed and 840 were unemployed. In 2011, the employment rate was 58.6%, while the unemployment rate was 8.9%.

**Table 5: Labour characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, Thorold, Ontario.**

| Labour Force Status  | Characteristics |      |        |
|--|-----------------|------|--------|
|  | Total           | Male | Female |
| Total Aboriginal identity population aged 15 years and over in private households by labour force status | 270             | 110  | 155    |
| In the labour force  | 160             | 70   | 85     |
| Employed   | 105             | 55   | 50     |
| Unemployed   | 50              | 0    | 35     |
| Not in the labour force  | 110             | 40   | 75     |
| Participation rate   | 59.3            | 63.6 | 54.8   |
| Employment rate  | 38.9            | 50.0 | 32.3   |
| Unemployment rate  | 31.2            | 0.0  | 41.2   |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile.<sup>8</sup>



## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In 2011, 50.5% of the 12,180 adults aged 25 years and over in Thorold had completed some form of postsecondary education, compared with 59.6% at the national level. Of the population aged 25 years and over in Thorold, 14.9% had a university certificate or degree. An additional 24.4% had a college diploma and 11.1% had a trades certificate. The share of the adult population that had completed a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment was 28.6%, while 20.9% had completed neither high school nor any postsecondary certificates, diplomas or degrees.

**Table 6: Education characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, Thorold, Ontario.**

| Education   | Characteristic |      |        |
|---|----------------|------|--------|
|   | Total          | Male | Female |
| Total Aboriginal identity population aged 15 years and over in private households by highest certificate, diploma or degree | 270            | 110  | 160    |
| No certificate, diploma or degree   | 90             | 30   | 55     |
| High school diploma or equivalent   | 70             | 30   | 45     |
| Postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree  | 105            | 50   | 60     |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile.<sup>8</sup>

## GEOGRAPHY

The land area of Thorold is 83.0 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of approximately 216 people per km<sup>2</sup>. This compares to the provincial land area of 908,607.67 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of approximately 14 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

## ACCESS

Thorold is centrally located within the Niagara Region. The city is 120 kilometers from Toronto, 10 kilometers from St. Catharines, and 19 kilometers from Niagara Falls and the United States borders. Thorold is located within an hour's drive of several airports, including Hamilton International Airport, Toronto's Pearson International Airport, Toronto Island Airport, and Buffalo International Airport. Also significant to Thorold is the Welland Canal, which allows connection to the St. Lawrence Seaway and Great Lakes H<sub>2</sub>O Highway.

## RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The city of Thorold offers numerous recreational facilities accessible to the community for a variety of healthy recreational activities. A brief review of the city's recreational facilities is presented below. More information can be found at the city's website ([www.thorold.com](http://www.thorold.com)).

### Arenas & Ice Rinks

- The Thorold Community Arena is an arena complex with two ice pads (Frank Doherty & James Whyte) located in the downtown area.

### Community Centers

- There are two community centers; one is located in Port Robinson and the other in Allanburg.

### Playing Fields

- Youth focused activities receive priority booking for the ball diamonds and soccer fields.

### Parks & Green Spaces

- The City of Thorold manages and maintains over 120 acres of parks, trails and green spaces.

Pools & Splash Pads

- The City of Thorold operates one outdoor swimming pool and six splash pads throughout the city.

**NIAGARA FALLS COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS**

The City of Niagara Falls is a vibrant city located in the heart of the Niagara Region.

**POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY**

In 2011, Niagara Falls had a population of 82,997, representing a 1.0% increase from 2006. This compares to the national average population growth of 5.9%. In 2011, 2.4% (1,960) of the population in Niagara Falls reported having an Aboriginal identity. Of those, 71.7% (1,405) reported being single identity First Nations, 23.7% (465) reported being single identity Métis, while there were no people who identified as single identity Inuit. An additional 3.1% (60) reported other Aboriginal identities and 0.0% reported more than one Aboriginal identity.<sup>7</sup>

Table 7 presents the Niagara Falls and overall Ontario population by Aboriginal identity.

**Table 7: Population by Aboriginal identity, Niagara Falls and Ontario**

| Population  | Niagara Falls |                       |                                     | Ontario    |                       |                                     |
|---|---------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
|   | Number        | % of total population | % of Aboriginal identity population | Number     | % of total population | % of Aboriginal identity population |
| Total population in private households                            | 81,300        | 100.0                 |                                     | 12,651,790 | 100.0                 |                                     |
| Aboriginal identity population                                    | 1,960         | 2.4                   | 100.0                               | 301,430    | 2.4                   | 100.0                               |
| First Nations single identity                                     | 1,405         | 1.7                   | 71.7                                | 201,100    | 1.6                   | 66.7                                |
| First Nations single identity (Registered or Treaty Indian)       | 675           | 0.8                   | 34.4                                | 125,560    | 1.0                   | 41.7                                |
| First Nations single identity (not a Registered or Treaty Indian) | 730           | 0.9                   | 37.2                                | 75,545     | 0.6                   | 25.1                                |
| Métis single identity   | 465           | 0.6                   | 23.7                                | 86,020     | 0.7                   | 28.5                                |
| Inuit single identity   | 0             | 0.0                   | 0.0                                 | 3,360      | 0.0                   | 1.1                                 |
| Multiple Aboriginal identities                                    | 0             | 0.0                   | 0.0                                 | 2,910      | 0.0                   | 1.0                                 |
| Aboriginal identities not included elsewhere                      | 60            | 0.1                   | 3.1                                 | 8,045      | 0.1                   | 2.7                                 |
| Non-Aboriginal identity population                                | 79,345        | 97.6                  | ...                                 | 12,350,365 | 97.6                  | ...                                 |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile.<sup>7</sup>

In Niagara Falls, Aboriginal children aged 14 and under represented 27.6% of the total Aboriginal population and 4.2% of all children in Niagara Falls. Non-Aboriginal children aged 14 and under accounted for 15.5% of the non-Aboriginal population.

## EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMY

In Niagara Falls, among the 43,535 in the labour force in 2011, 39,635 people were employed and 3,895 were unemployed. The employment rate was 57.9%, while the unemployment rate was 8.9% in 2011.

**Table 8: Labour characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, Niagara Falls, Ontario**

| Labour Force Status  | Characteristics |      |        |
|--|-----------------|------|--------|
|  | Total           | Male | Female |
| Total Aboriginal identity population aged 15 years and over in private households by labour force status | 1,415           | 735  | 680    |
| In the labour force  | 895             | 500  | 395    |
| Employed   | 750             | 445  | 305    |
| Unemployed   | 145             | 60   | 90     |
| Not in the labour force  | 520             | 230  | 290    |
| Participation rate   | 63.3            | 68.0 | 58.1   |
| Employment rate  | 53.0            | 60.5 | 44.9   |
| Unemployment rate  | 16.2            | 12.0 | 22.8   |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile.<sup>7</sup>

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

In 2011, 51.4% of the 57,950 adults aged 25 years and over in Niagara Falls had completed some form of postsecondary education, compared with 59.6% at the national level. Of the population aged 25 years and over in Niagara Falls, 17.6% had a university certificate or degree. An additional 23.0% had a college diploma and 10.8% had a trades certificate. The share of the adult population that had completed a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment was 29.4%, and 19.2% had completed neither high school nor any postsecondary certificates, diplomas or degrees.

**Table 9: Education characteristics of Aboriginal Canadians, Niagara Falls, Ontario**

| Education   | Characteristic |      |        |
|---|----------------|------|--------|
|   | Total          | Male | Female |
| Total Aboriginal identity population aged 15 years and over in private households by highest certificate, diploma or degree | 1,415          | 735  | 680    |
| No certificate, diploma or degree   | 390            | 245  | 145    |
| High school diploma or equivalent   | 305            | 125  | 180    |
| Postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree  | 725            | 365  | 360    |

Data source: 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) Aboriginal Population Profile.<sup>7</sup>

## GEOGRAPHY

The land area of Niagara Falls is 209.71 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of approximately 396 people per km<sup>2</sup>. This compares to the provincial land area of 908,607.67 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of approximately 14 people per km<sup>2</sup>.

## ACCESS

Access to Niagara Falls is possible by road, rail, air or water. Niagara Falls is located within an hour's drive of several airports, including Hamilton International Airport, Toronto's Pearson International Airport, Toronto Island Airport, and Buffalo International Airport. In addition, Via Rail and Amtrak both offer service to the Niagara Falls area. Niagara Falls is also in close proximity to the Welland Canal, which allows connection to the St. Lawrence

Seaway and Great Lakes H<sub>2</sub>O Highway. Connecting Niagara Falls to the United States are the Rainbow and Whirlpool Bridges.

## RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The city of Niagara Falls offers numerous recreational facilities accessible to the community for a variety of healthy recreational activities. A brief review of the city's recreational facilities is presented below. More information can be found at the city's website ([www.niagarafalls.ca](http://www.niagarafalls.ca)).

### Arenas & Ice Rinks

- The City of Niagara Falls has two arenas combining for a total of five ice surfaces. Gale Centre has four ice pads and Willoughby Memorial (Chippawa Arena) has one ice pad.

### Community Centers

- The City of Niagara Falls provides a variety of recreational programs and community services and facilities to the public and community groups. There are two community centers within the city.

### Playing Fields

- Many of the parks throughout the city have ball diamonds, courts and soccer fields. Oaks Park also has a track open to the community.

### Parks & Green Spaces

- The City of Niagara Falls has multiple parks and outdoor sports facilities.

### Pools & Splash Pads

- There are several pools in the community, along with six splash pads.

## ABORIGINAL IDENTITY WITHIN THE NIAGARA REGION

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The Aboriginal community within the Niagara Region is diverse, with First Nations, Métis and Inuit all residing in the region. Many of the Aboriginal people in the Niagara Region are from the Haudenosaunee, Anishinabek and Cree communities. Historically, the population of Aboriginal peoples in the region has varied due in part to migration, warfare and diplomacy. However, there remain several Nations in the Niagara Region, including the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinabek Nations that deem the area to be part of their ancestral territory. Furthermore, the Métis population in the region is growing.

With the Niagara Region lying on the border between the United States and Canada, many of the Aboriginal people in the area, particularly those from the Haudenosaunee communities, do not view the border as a constraint that affects where they may live, work or travel on a daily basis. This has influenced, in part, the transient nature of the population, and has potentially affected the services offered by organizations working with the Aboriginal population.

Another aspect that may influence the degree of services offered to the Aboriginal population is the vast catchment area of Aboriginal organizations in the Niagara Region. The issue has likely led to pockets of underserved people among the Aboriginal population.

## SERVICES AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVE THE LOCAL ABORIGINAL POPULATION

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The following services and organizations serve the Niagara Region and are accessible to the community at large.

### HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The Niagara Health System (NHS) is Ontario's largest multi-site hospital amalgamation comprised of six sites serving 434,000 residents across the 12 municipalities making up the Regional Municipality of Niagara.

- Douglas Memorial Site in Fort Erie
- Greater Niagara General Site in Niagara Falls
- Niagara-on-the-Lake Site
- Port Colborne Site
- St. Catharines Site
- Welland Site

### LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORK (LHIN)

LHINs are responsible for planning, integrating and funding health-care providers, including hospitals, community mental health and addictions agencies, community support services, community health centers, community care access centers and long-term care homes. The Niagara Health System is one of the health-care agencies in the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN.

### THE SOUTHERN ONTARIO ABORIGINAL DIABETES INITIATIVE (SOADI)

The emphasis of SOADI is the development and enhancement of programs and services focusing on the education, prevention, and management of diabetes in Aboriginal communities.

SOADI Head Office  
3250 Schmon Parkway  
Thorold ONT L2V 4Y6

PH: 1-888 514 1370 FX: 1-866 352 0485

Email: [officeadministrator@soadi.ca](mailto:officeadministrator@soadi.ca)

The SOADI 13 Grandmother Moons Diabetes Wellness Curriculum support frontline workers to plan, prepare and present relevant information about diabetes while reflecting Aboriginal perspectives on health and wellness.

### SOCIAL SERVICES (PUBLIC AND PRIVATE)

The Niagara Region offers numerous social services to meet the needs of the community. Searching for the most appropriate service can be aided with the use of the following:

- **Niagara Community information database** ([www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com](http://www.niagaraknowledgeexchange.com))
  - The Niagara Community Information Database is a searchable database of Niagara community and social service information. This database assists in the identification of local services to inform decision-making and planning.
- **Contact Niagara**
  - Information Niagara, the local provider of 2-1-1, is a community based non-profit organization which provides assessment, information, referral and interpreting services to the people and communities of Niagara.

- **InCommunities** ([www.informationniagara.com](http://www.informationniagara.com))
  - IN Communities is a source for community and social service information in the Niagara Region. The database contains records of programs and services available to the Niagara community.

Following is a brief review of a variety of social service organizations, within the Niagara Region, which have a focus on providing programs for children and youth, utilized by the community at large.

- **Gillian's Place** ([www.womensplacestcatharines.ca](http://www.womensplacestcatharines.ca))
  - A safe shelter for women and children who have suffered abuse. They provide meals and clothing, as well as child and youth programs.
- **St. Catharines YWCA** ([www.ywcaniagararegion.ca](http://www.ywcaniagararegion.ca))
  - Temporary housing and shelter for women over the age of 16 who are homeless. There are programs available for children staying at the centre (St Catharines).
- **The Raft** ([www.theraft.ca](http://www.theraft.ca))
  - Provides shelter and support to homeless and high risk youth in Niagara. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- **Community Care of St. Catharines and Thorold**
  - Provides a full continuum of services and supports to individuals and families who are struggling with poverty.
- **Boys and Girls Club of Niagara**
  - A safe and supportive place for children and youth to experience new opportunities and build skills for life.

St. Catharines Queen Elizabeth Centre  
2 Facer Street  
St. Catharines, ON L2M 5G9

<http://www.boysandgirlsclubniagara.org/programs/stcatharines#sthash.i8jdeYmm.dpuf>

Ontario Street Public School  
550 Allanburg Road

Thorold, ON <http://www.boysandgirlsclubniagara.org/programs/thorold#sthash.JtXEMHQ9.dpuf>

Niagara Falls Centre  
8800 McLeod Road  
Niagara Falls, ON L2E 6S5

Tel: 905-357-2444 Fax: 905-357-7401

<http://www.boysandgirlsclubniagara.org/programs/niagara-falls#sthash.3W9iLfju.dpuf>

- **YMCA of Niagara**
  - The YMCA offers child and youth programs which enable skill development and responsibility.

St. Catharines Walker Branch  
YMCA of Niagara  
25 YMCA Drive, St. Catharines, ON L2N 7P9  
Tel: 905 934 9622 Fax: 905 934 9665

- **Nightlight Youth Shelter** ([www.boysandgirlsclubniagara.org](http://www.boysandgirlsclubniagara.org))
  - Emergency shelter for homeless and at risk-youth, designed to assist youth reach their full potential through shelter and program services.
- **Women's Place of South Niagara Inc.** ([www.womensplacen.org](http://www.womensplacen.org))
  - Emergency shelter at Nova House in Niagara Falls and in Welland at Serenity Place temporary accommodations and meals for women and their children

## EDUCATION

The education system in the Niagara Region includes primary and secondary schools, in addition to post-secondary educational opportunities. Below is a brief review of the education system:

- Aboriginal Education Advisory Council (AEAC) - The AEAC is comprised of local Aboriginal community members, Aboriginal organizations, the Aboriginal Student Services Department of Brock University and Niagara College, and representatives from the District School Board of Niagara and the Niagara Catholic District School Board. This committee is intended to advise and collaborate on improving Aboriginal student outcomes.
- The Board of Education offer instruction in English, French and French Immersion.
- District School Board of Niagara (DSBN)
- Niagara Catholic District School Board (NCDSB)
- Conseil Scolaire du District Catholique Centre-Sud (CSDCCS)
- Brock University - Located in St. Catharines, Brock University offers many degree options. Brock University also has Aboriginal Student Services.
- Niagara College – Niagara College has three campuses located in Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Welland. Niagara College also offers Aboriginal Student Services.
- Although not in the Region that this scan focused on, the Fort Erie Aboriginal Head Start Program provides services to Aboriginal peoples who are able to travel to this program. It is a pre-school program for Aboriginal children with a focus on education readiness, social support, nutrition, parental involvement, health, culture and language.
- Although not in the Region that this scan focused on, the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre's Alternative High School Program will provide services to Aboriginal peoples who are able to travel to this program. In conjunction with the District School Board of Niagara, it offers an alternative high school program for achieving an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

## ABORIGINAL-SPECIFIC ORGANIZATIONS

- Located in Niagara Falls is Neto Hatinakwe Onkwehowe Native Arts, it is a charitable not-for-profit arts services organization that provides arts services to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members in the Niagara Region (<http://www.netoartscanada.com/>).
- Friendship Centres - There are two Friendship centers in the Niagara Region, both providing programs for children and youth. Both centers have large catchment areas. Therefore, a means of transportation is important in accessing these services. Below is a review of the programs offered at one or both of the Friendship Centers in the Niagara Region that may help to address the issue of childhood and youth obesity:
  - **Aboriginal Healthy Babies Healthy Children (AHBHC)** - Healthy opportunities for the development of children 6 years and younger.

- **Akwe:go: Urban Aboriginal Children's Program** - Improves the quality of life of urban Aboriginal children ages 7 to 12 years of age.
- **Children's Mental Health Project (CMHP)** - Provides services and support to children ages 7 to 15 years and their families, with a focus on behavioural and mental health needs.
- **Cultural Connections for Aboriginal Youth (CCAY)** - Youth designed and led projects for urban Aboriginal youth ages 10 to 24 years.
- **Wasa-Nabin: Urban Aboriginal Youth Program** - A self-development program for urban Aboriginal at-risk youth between the ages of 13 to 18 years.
- **Healing and Wellness Program** - Family violence support services ensuring that individual healing and wellness needs are addressed.
- **Health Outreach Program** - Ensure that the health needs of community members are addressed in areas that do not have Aboriginal Health Access Centres.
- **Life Long Care Program** - Provides services for those who have physical disabilities, serious health issues, or who are frail and/or elderly.
- **Urban Aboriginal Healthy Living Program** - Promotes and supports healthier lifestyles for urban Aboriginal peoples.
- The following programs sponsored through Public Health are also offered through a Friendship Centre.
  - Community Action Program for Children (CAP-C)
  - Canadian Pre-natal Nutritional Program
  - Fort Erie Aboriginal Head Start
- Niagara Regional Native Centre - Niagara-on-the-Lake
- Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre – Fort Erie
- Niagara Chapter of Native Women inc.
  - Aboriginal Community Support Facilitator
- Métis Nation of Ontario - Welland Council
- Southern Ontario Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative - Niagara Region
- These services are located outside of Niagara, but provide service to Niagara:
  - National Aboriginal Diabetes Association
  - Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy

#### MISSING ELEMENTS IN COMMUNITY

There are no Aboriginal social service organizations located within the city of Niagara Falls. Aboriginal community members living in the city must use the mainstream social service organizations or access one or more of the Aboriginal organizations outside of the city. Organizations in the Niagara Region offer Aboriginal-specific services, but there remain underserved Aboriginal peoples because of the size of the Region and difficulties obtaining transportation to such services.

In addition, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls do not have Aboriginal-specific alternative school programs. These programs are missing at pre-school, primary and secondary education levels.



## COMPONENTS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM AND ACCESS (WITH EMPHASIS ON HEALTHY WEIGHTS)

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### LOCAL HEALTH INTEGRATION NETWORKS

The Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN) are mandated to engage their Aboriginal communities in the planning and delivery of health services, and to report each year on the health status of their Aboriginal populations. The Aboriginal population experiences higher rates of unemployment, coupled with lower rates of education and income. Aboriginal communities also face higher mortality rates and use health services to a greater extent than provincial and national averages.<sup>9</sup>

In 2009, the total population of Aboriginal peoples living on or off-reserve in the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant (HNHB) LHIN was 24,000 or 1.7% of the total LHIN population.<sup>9</sup> There are two reserves in the HNHB LHIN: Six Nations of the Grand River Territory and Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. Population data for non-status, Métis, and Inuit Aboriginal populations are not precise; people are mobile, homelessness is high and some Aboriginal persons choose not to self-identify.<sup>9</sup>

Aboriginal peoples face some unique health challenges. In fact, several research studies have found that the health of Aboriginal people across the country is below the national average. Life expectancy is lower and the four leading causes of death are injury and poisoning, heart diseases, cancer and lung diseases (lung cancer is the most common kind of cancer among Aboriginal men). In addition, diabetes is rising steadily, and obesity rates are twice the national rate. Teenage smoking is higher than average. All forms of addictions occur at a higher rate than among other Canadians. Major depression is becoming increasingly common. Low birth weights are increasing, and infant death rates are higher than typically found in Canada.

The data on the health status of Aboriginal people in this region is limited. However, the HNHB LHIN's Aboriginal Health Network provides an opportunity for Aboriginal health and social service organizations to collaborate, understand and address the health needs of the local Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal Health Network's membership list is available here:  
<http://www.hnhblhin.on.ca/goalsandachievements/integrationpopulationbased/aboriginalhealthandwellness/aboriginalhealthnetworkmembership.aspx>

### THE ONTARIO HEALTH QUALITY COUNCIL - ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

The Ontario Health Quality Council suggested in its 2006 First Yearly Report that Aboriginal peoples, rural Ontarians, the poor, and women face barriers when accessing health care.<sup>10</sup> These include stigma related to illnesses or lifestyle. Some people report a lack of culturally and language-appropriate care or services. Others may not have transportation to take them to a provider due to living in remote or rural areas, or are required to care for their child and unable to attend appointments. However, even Aboriginal people living in urban centers may be isolated by culture. Many people simply are not aware of services that exist.

### ONTARIO'S ABORIGINAL HEALING AND WELLNESS STRATEGY

The Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy promotes healthy Aboriginal communities through the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy. The Strategy combines traditional and mainstream programs and services to help improve Aboriginal health and reduce family violence. These community-based programs and services are available to Aboriginal people living on-reserve and in urban and rural communities. It provides crisis intervention

and support services to those who are at risk or are currently experiencing family violence and/or crisis in their lives. The program offers supportive peer counselling, referrals to community agencies, healing/talking circles, cultural events and other forms of support from an Aboriginal perspective and is delivered through Health and Wellness Coordinators located at numerous Friendship Centers across Ontario. In the Niagara Region, this strategy is being facilitated from various locations:

- Niagara Regional Native Centre, Niagara-on-the-Lake
- Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre

#### *Goals and Objectives*

The goal of the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy (AHWS) is to foster improvements in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal individuals, families, communities and Nations through:

- Provision of equitable access to primary health and healing services and programmes, including prevention, treatment and support, that are culturally appropriate and culturally competent;
- Building on the strengths and enhancing the capacities of Aboriginal communities; and,
- Promotion of equitable, violence-free relationships and healthy environments.

This is a traditional and culturally appropriate approach to healing and wellness for all Aboriginal peoples of Ontario which will ensure Aboriginal people have better access to the type of health care and services most other Ontarians take for granted.

An important feature of the Strategy is that services and programs are Aboriginal designed, delivered and controlled, with government primarily playing an administrative role. Empowerment is a key aspect in promoting wellness in Aboriginal communities striving for self-reliance by using traditional and cultural teachings and values that kept them strong in the past. The strategy includes various sub committees that oversee Research and Evaluation, Policy and Planning, Specialized Projects and the Aboriginal Healthy Babies and Healthy Children's Working Group.

Other components of the strategy include:

- *Aboriginal Healing & Wellness Coordinators (HWC)* – ensure that the healing and wellness needs of the Aboriginal community are addressed by implementing the AHWS at the local level in order to reduce family violence, promote healthy lifestyles, culture based programming and healing. The coordinators provide an array of different services to meet the needs of their communities, such as; crisis intervention, healing/talking circles for men, women and children; education, prevention and promotion workshops for community members and agencies; cultural awareness; cultural teachings; and peer counselling both one on one and family.
- *Aboriginal Health Outreach Workers (HOW)* - ensure that the health needs of the Aboriginal community are addressed by undertaking health promotion, education, referrals and linking those offering Aboriginal cultural resources with mainstream health providers.
- *Children's Mental Health Demonstration Projects* - supports Aboriginal Children's mental health. The goal is to decrease youth involvement in gang activity, violence, drug and alcohol abuse and address mental health/addiction issues that often result from a history of family violence.

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