

Poverty Report Series - Chapter Two Release

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

Meeting Date: September 2, 2026

Report No. **BH.01.SEP0226.R21**, Pages: 33

Prepared By: Jacob MacKinlay, Health Promotion Specialist
Michael Whyte, Manager, Data & Analytics
Kyley Alderson, Manager, Health Promotion

Approved By: Dr. Kyle Wilson, PhD, MBA, MSc
VP, Information Systems & Digital Innovation

Submitted By & Signature: Original signed document on file.
Dr. Nicola J. Mercer, MD, MBA, MPH, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health & CEO

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Poverty is a foundational social determinant of health that contributes to health inequities and influences health outcomes across the life course.
- The attached *Poverty Report Series – Chapter Two: How Poverty is Experienced Locally* provides an evidence-informed overview of how poverty is experienced across Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG), highlighting growing pressures related to income adequacy, housing affordability, food insecurity, and homelessness.
- Local findings demonstrate that financial pressures continue to increase despite employment for many households. In 2024, approximately one in four households in WDG experienced food insecurity, while housing costs continue to outpace incomes for many residents.
- This report series supports WDGPH's work under the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) by strengthening population health assessment, advancing health equity, and providing evidence to inform collaborative action with community partners.

Background

Poverty is widely recognized as a foundational social determinant of health, influencing opportunities for healthy living across the life course and contributing to health inequities.¹ Recognizing poverty as a public health issue aligns closely with the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), particularly the foundational standards related to Population Health Assessment and Health Equity.²

To support evidence-informed planning and strengthen a shared understanding of poverty across the region, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG) partnered with the Guelph-Wellington Poverty Elimination Collaborative to develop a multi-part Poverty Report series.

Chapter One established the foundation for the series by describing poverty as a complex public health issue, outlining how poverty is defined and measured in Canada, and demonstrating its alignment with provincial and national reduction strategies.³

The attached Chapter Two builds upon this foundation by examining how poverty is experienced across WDG through a local lens. Using current local, provincial, and national evidence, the report explores the relationship between income, employment, housing affordability, social assistance, food insecurity, homelessness, and the population disproportionately affected by poverty.

Discussion

While poverty is often understood through income alone, the attached report demonstrates that it is experienced through the interaction of multiple social, economic, and policy factors. Housing affordability, food insecurity, employment conditions, and income adequacy are closely interconnected and collectively influence the health and well-being of residents throughout Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG).

Several findings illustrate the increasing financial pressures experienced locally. In 2025, the regional living wage was estimated at \$23.00 per hour, compared with Ontario's minimum wage of \$17.60 per hour, highlighting the growing gap between earnings and the cost of meeting basic needs. Approximately one in four households in WDG experienced food insecurity in 2024, representing the highest prevalence recorded locally in approximately two decades. The report also identifies continued increases in social assistance caseloads and chronic homelessness, reinforcing that many households continue to experience significant financial strain despite employment or existing income supports.

Beyond describing current conditions, the report establishes a common evidence base that can support WDGPH, municipalities, healthcare organizations, and community partners in identifying shared priorities and informing future planning. The findings reinforce that reducing poverty requires coordinated action across sectors and that addressing the upstream drivers of poverty is essential to improving health outcomes and reducing health inequities.

The Poverty Report series will continue through two additional chapters. Chapter Three will examine the relationship between poverty and health outcomes across the life course, including chronic disease, mental health, substance use, and life expectancy, while incorporating local vignettes that illustrate lived experience. The final chapter will synthesize findings from the report series and present evidence-informed recommendations and practices that can support poverty reduction and improved health equity across WDG.

Health Equity Implications

Poverty disproportionately affects populations that already experience systemic barriers, including Indigenous peoples, racialized communities, newcomers, people with disabilities, lone-parent families, and individuals experiencing housing instability or homelessness.^{4,5} Improving local understanding of these inequities strengthens WDGPH's ability to apply a health equity lens to surveillance, planning, and partnership development. By identifying the structural conditions that contribute to poverty, the report supports evidence-informed approaches that seek to reduce avoidable differences in health outcomes across the region.

Conclusion

The *Poverty Report Series – Chapter Two: How Poverty is Experienced Locally* builds upon the conceptual foundation established in Chapter One by providing a comprehensive picture of how poverty is experienced across Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph (WDG). Together, the first two chapters strengthen understanding of poverty as a public health issue and provide an important evidence base to inform future planning, partnerships, and action. The remaining chapters will further examine the health impacts of poverty and identify evidence-informed opportunities to improve health equity and reduce poverty across the region.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- ☒ Population Health Assessment
- ☒ Health Equity
- ☐ Effective Public Health Practice
- ☐ Emergency Management

Program Standards

- ☒ Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- ☒ Food Safety
- ☒ Healthy Environments
- ☒ Healthy Growth and Development
- ☐ Immunization
- ☐ Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- ☐ Safe Water
- ☐ School Health
- ☒ Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- ☒ Improve health outcomes
- ☐ Focus on children's health
- ☒ Build strong partnerships
- ☐ Innovate our programs and services
- ☐ Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system

References

1. Raphael D, Bryant T, Mikkonen J, Raphael A. Social determinants of health: The Canadian facts. 2nd ed. Oshawa & Toronto: Ontario Tech University Faculty of Health Sciences & York University School of Health Policy and Management; 2020. Available from: https://thecanadianfacts.org/The_Canadian_Facts-2nd_ed.pdf
2. Ontario Ministry of Health. Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for programs, services, and accountability. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario; 2021. Available from: <https://files.ontario.ca/moh-ontario-public-health-standards-en-2021.pdf>
3. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. Poverty Report Chapter One: Understanding Poverty as a Public Health Issue [Internet]. 2026. Available from: https://wdgpublichealth.ca/sites/default/files/2026-02/2026_poverty_report_-_chapter_1.pdf
4. Hou F, Schimmele C, Stick M. Poverty among racialized groups across generations. Economic & Social Reports. 2023;3(8). Available from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2023008/article/00002-eng.htm>
5. Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. Poverty and child welfare: poverty in Indigenous and racialized communities [Internet]. N.d. Available from: <https://oacas.libguides.com/c.php?g=702168&p=4993507>

Appendices

Appendix A: Poverty Report Chapter Two – How Poverty Is Experienced Locally.