

Introducing a Poverty Report Series in WDG

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

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

Key Points

- WDGPH is launching a new multi-chapter poverty report series to strengthen understanding of poverty in the region and guide evidence-informed action.
- Chapter 1 establishes foundational concepts, definitions, and measurement approaches for understanding poverty as a determinant of health and source of health inequity.
- Future chapters (2026) will focus on local data, populations at risk, housing and cost-of-living pressures, and community-driven initiatives.
- The series aligns closely with the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), particular Population Health Assessment and Health Equity, and with the WDGPH Strategic Plan goals to reduce health inequities and improve health outcomes.
- This work is designed to complement, not duplicate, existing partner-led poverty initiatives, using a collaborative and equity-informed lens.
- Community partnerships are central to the development of this series, with the Guelph-Wellington Poverty Elimination Task Force and Dufferin-based organizations contributing expertise, context, and lived experience.

Background

Poverty remains one of the most powerful and persistent determinants of health in Canada, and its effects are acutely felt across the communities of Wellington, Dufferin, and Guelph.^{1,2} Poverty shapes access to healthy housing, nutritious food, transportation, education, and other critical resources needed for people to thrive. It also limits social inclusion, autonomy, and opportunities for full participation in community life. These conditions produce and sustain health inequities over the life course and across generations.¹

Recognizing the scope and complexity of poverty, WDGP is initiating a multi-chapter poverty report series. The purpose of this series is to build a shared, evidence-informed understanding of poverty in WDG and its connection to health and wellbeing. The series is being developed in close alignment with the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS), particularly the Population Health Assessment and Health Equity standards and with Strategic Plan Goal 1: *Improve health outcomes by reducing health inequities*.

The first chapter of the series, Understanding Poverty, is a foundational, qualitative release that defines poverty, explains its drivers, and describes how it is measured in Canada. It also outlines how poverty intersects with public health goals and introduces a socioecological model adapted for WDG. Later chapters will focus on population-level data and community-identified themes such as food insecurity, housing, working poverty, and policy responses.

Discussion

There is a growing recognition among public health agencies, community partners, and all levels of government that addressing poverty is essential to improving health. The Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) Health Equity standard calls on public health units to reduce unfair and avoidable differences in health outcomes by understanding and addressing the social conditions that shape risk, access, and resilience. In the WDG region, this includes ensuring that residents facing poverty are not left behind in health planning and response.³

Locally, there is an abundance of poverty-related data and community knowledge and expertise. However, this information is often siloed across organizations. The poverty report series responds to this gap by providing a centralized, coherent, and updated picture of poverty and health in WDG. It will also enable WDGP and partners to make equity-informed decisions, advocate for systemic change, and track progress toward poverty reduction goals.

Chapter 1: Establishing a Foundation

Chapter 1 of the series establishes the foundational knowledge needed to guide future chapters. It covers:

- Conceptual models of poverty, including absolute and relative poverty, material and social deprivation, and social exclusion.
- Strengths and limitations of common poverty measures, including the Market Basket Measure (MBM), Low Income Measure (LIM), and experience-based indicators like food insecurity.
- Structural and systemic drivers, including the role of housing, employment standards, colonialism, racism, and gender inequity.
- A socioecological model illustrating the layered influences on poverty in WDG.
- Narratives (vignettes) illustrating the lived experiences of poverty in the region, created by individuals with lived experiences with poverty (in partnership with the Guelph-Wellington Poverty Elimination Task Force).
- Overview of federal and provincial strategies including *Opportunity for All* and *Building a Strong Foundation for Success*.

This chapter is designed to be accessible and relevant to a broad audience: municipal leaders, service providers, planners, researchers, and community advocates. It is not an endpoint, but a shared starting point for public health and community action.

Future Chapters & Scope

Future chapters, planned for release through 2026, will be quantitative and thematically focused. Each will explore a specific issue related to poverty using local data, equity-based analysis, and insights from community consultation. Planned topics include:

- Who experiences poverty in WDG (demographic and geographic distribution)
- Links between poverty and health outcomes across the life course
- Food and housing insecurity
- Cost-of-living pressures
- Working poverty and social assistance trends
- Evidence-informed actions and community-led solutions

These themes may appear as standalone chapters or be integrated where topics naturally overlap. The format is designed to balance depth and accessibility, ensuring each release is actionable and relevant to local planning and service delivery.

At present, chapters are planned for release approximately once per quarter. It is anticipated that by February 2027, the series will be formally concluded, providing a comprehensive and locally grounded picture of poverty and health in WDG. Updates may continue as new evidence becomes available, particularly with the release of the 2026 Census data.

Community Partnerships

Community partnerships are central to the success and integrity of this poverty report series. WDGPH is committed to ensuring that the content reflects lived realities, shared priorities, and diverse local contexts across WDG.

The Guelph and Wellington Poverty Elimination Collaborative is a key partner in this work. Their team is actively contributing to the series by helping navigate the local poverty landscape, providing access to relevant data, and supporting the inclusion of community voices. Their experience and networks are especially valuable in identifying structural challenges and highlighting local responses. Toward Common Ground has also provided expertise in resource allocation and review.

To ensure a balanced and inclusive regional perspective, WDGPH has also reached out to organizations in Dufferin County. Engagements are underway to ensure that Dufferin-based data, stories, and priorities are meaningfully represented in future chapters. This outreach reflects the Agency's commitment to regional equity and to amplifying the insights partners working directly with people experiencing poverty.

Conclusion

WDGPH's new poverty report series represents a strategic investment in understanding and addressing one of the most significant health challenges facing the WDG region. With the release of Chapter 1, a foundation for data, collaboration, and equity-driven action is established. Future chapters will deepen the understanding of poverty's local dimensions and support targeted responses that reflect the lived realities of WDG communities.

The Board of Health's awareness and engagement with this work will be vital as WDGPH moves forward with its commitment to reducing poverty and promoting health equity across WDG.

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

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2. Government of Canada. Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy. [Internet]. 2022 April. [cited 2026 January 12]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html>
3. Ontario. Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services and Accountability. 2021 June. [cited 2026 January 12]. Available from: <https://files.ontario.ca/moh-ontario-public-health-standards-en-2021.pdf>