



Niagara Community Observatory

Public Health

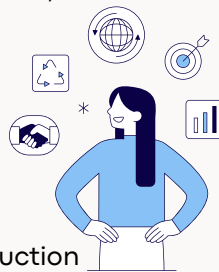
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What is Niagara Region Responsible for in Public Health?

Public health in Niagara is delivered at the Regional level. Niagara Regional Council acts as Niagara's Board of Health and is accountable for the programs it delivers. This authority flows from the province, which requires boards of health to deliver mandatory programs, and sets out the minimum requirements for those programs.

Responsibilities Include:

- Infectious disease surveillance, investigation, and outbreak response
- Immunization and school vaccination programs
- Food safety and environmental health inspections
- Family, sexual, and oral health programs
- Substance-use prevention and harm reduction
- Emergency preparedness and response



What is NOT a Regional Public Health Responsibility?

Hospitals, OHIP, physician billing/remuneration, and most medical care delivery are provincial responsibilities. Niagara Health (the local hospital system) is a separate organization from Niagara Region Public Health.

However, the Region funds and coordinates the Physician Recruitment Program in partnership with all 12 area municipalities.



Trends and Developments

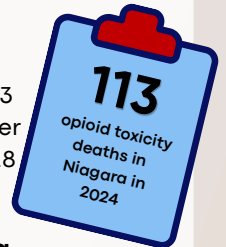
Governance is changing

Starting with the 2026-2030 term, Niagara Regional Council (which also acts as the Board of Health) will comprise the 12 local mayors and a Regional Chair appointed by the province. No regional councillors will be directly elected.



Opioid-related deaths remain high

Since 2016, Niagara's opioid-toxicity death rate has consistently exceeded Ontario's. In 2024, Niagara recorded 113 opioid-toxicity deaths: a rate of 20.4 per 100,000 population, compared with 13.8 per 100,000 in Ontario.



Population growth and aging

Niagara's population at the 2021 Census was 477,941, up 6.7% from its 2016 population of 447,888. The Region targets 694,000 by 2051. Niagara skews older than the rest of the province.

Niagara Region Median Age, 2021	Canada Median Age, 2021
46	41

Emerging and re-emerging infectious risks



In 2025, Niagara's infectious-disease surveillance data reported 8 confirmed measles cases, 42 Lyme disease cases, and 8 West Nile virus cases.

Climate & environmental health risks

Potential health effects include extreme-heat illness, air-pollution impacts, flooding and water contamination, food-safety risks, and changing mosquito- and tick-borne disease patterns.



Recent Health-Care Initiatives



During the first six months of 2026, Niagara added 10 family physicians and connected more than 9,000 additional residents to primary care.

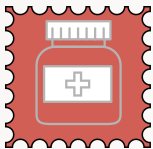


In June 2026, Niagara Region and Niagara Health formalized a new partnership to jointly recruit specialists — not just family doctors

Ongoing Challenges for Niagara



Starting with the new term, Regional Council, and therefore the Board of Health, will consist of the 12 mayors and a provincially appointed Chair, with no independently elected regional councillors. How will this change affect the visibility, accountability, and prioritization of public health?



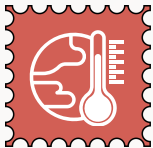
Opioid mortality has declined from the exceptional levels observed during the pandemic, but the burden remains high and Niagara continues to exceed the provincial rate.



Niagara is growing and has a large older population, increasing the importance of prevention, accessibility, healthy aging, emergency preparedness, and equitable distribution of services across communities. At the 2021 Census, 23.3 per cent of Niagara's population was aged 65 years or older, up from 21.4 per cent in 2016.



Maintaining public-health capacity for prevention and preparedness against infectious risks remains a key responsibility in the coming years.



Climate-related health risks increasingly intersect with municipal planning and emergency preparedness.

Questions for Municipal Candidates



As a member of the Region's Board of Health, what public-health priorities will you personally push for, and how will you keep the public informed?



How will you ensure Niagara has sufficient public-health capacity for prevention, disease surveillance, vaccination, environmental health, and emergency preparedness as the population grows and public-health risks change?



Niagara's opioid-toxicity death rate has exceeded Ontario's for almost a decade. Which specific actions would you support under the new Substance Use Strategy, and how would you assess whether those actions are reducing deaths?

For More Information:

Health Protection and Promotion Act: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h07>

Ontario Public Health Standards: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-public-health-standards-requirements-programs-services-and-accountability>

Niagara Physician Recruitment Program: <https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/professionals/physician-recruitment/default.aspx>

Niagara Region and Niagara Health launch joint physician recruitment partnership, June 17, 2026: <https://niagaracanada.com/niagara-region-and-niagara-health-launch-joint-physician-recruitment-partnership/>

Niagara adds 10 family physicians and connects more than 9,000 residents to primary care; Aug 19, 2026: <https://niagaracanada.com/niagara-adds-10-family-physicians-and-connects-more-than-9000-residents-to-primary-care/>

Infectious Diseases: <https://www.niagararegion.ca/health/statistics/disease/default.aspx>

Climate Change and Human Health: <https://www.niagararegion.ca/culture-and-environment/climate-change/health.aspx>

Population and Aging Statistics, Focus on Geography Series: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?topic=2&dguid=2021A00033526&lang=E> and

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710015201>