

# 04

## Supporting Families to Champion Positive Youth Development:

An outlook on youth's experiences of discrimination, homelessness, and food insecurity

# Key findings from the 2021 Halton Youth Impact Survey

In May and June 2021, 2599 young people completed the Halton Youth Impact Survey (HYIS). In November 2021, 44 youth participated in a Youth Data Party to validate the findings and share feedback on how their peers, schools, communities, and organizations serving youth can make a positive impact on young people in Halton. This is the fourth in a series of Data Action Bulletins to share findings from the Halton Youth Impact Survey and mobilize community partners to take action to support youth in Halton. For more information on the Halton Youth Impact Survey, visit [HYIS Results](#).

We partnered with UNICEF Canada, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Medavie Foundation on this project.

**How are families doing in Halton?**

**Do our children and youth have the right conditions for positive development?**

## Safe and supportive conditions help families thrive

Families play an important role in the lives of young people. A strong and stable family provides stimulating, interactive experiences to nurture positive development. For families to be strong and stable, they need to be supported within inclusive and welcoming spaces throughout Halton.

When families are protected and supported, children and youth find a safe environment and a sense of personal security that allow them to take maximum advantage of learning, playing and making new friendships.

Families, children, and youth are deeply impacted when faced with challenges to fulfil basic needs, such as housing and food. For all children and youth to thrive, families need to have access to an adequate standard of living that supports their health and wellbeing.

# Sociodemographic characteristics of this sample (n=2516).

		N	%	
<b>GENDER</b>	Female	1112	49%	
	Male	1067	47%	
	Non-binary	30	1%	
	Another gender identity*	51	2%	
<b>AGE</b>	8-12 years	213	10%	
	13-15 years	1010	47%	
	16-18 years	905	43%	
<b>GRADE</b>	Elementary school	247	13%	
	Secondary school	1632	87%	
<b>MUNICIPALITY</b>	Burlington	321	19%	
	Halton Hills	137	8%	
	Milton	448	27%	
	Oakville	770	46%	
<b>IMMIGRATION</b>	Newcomer**	249	11%	
	More than 5 years	271	12%	
	Born in Canada	1657	76%	
<b>CONDITION</b>	Living with chronic illness or disability	321	14%	
<b>VISIBLE MINORITY***</b>	Belongs to a visible minority group	1060	48%	
<b>INDIGENOUS</b>	Identifies as First Nations, Métis, Inuit or other	366	17%	

\* Participants could self-identify and enter their own gender identity. The most frequent response was non-binary. Other responses included: gender fluid (13), questioning/not sure (10), demigirl (3), agender (12), genderqueer (2).

\*\* Living in Canada for five years or less.

\*\*\* Respondents could self-identify with one or more race. While the most frequent response was white (44%), 56% of responses were across diverse racial categories such as: South Asian (20%), East Asian (12%), Middle Eastern (8%), Black (8%), Southeast Asian (5%) and Latino (4%). For the purposes of this report, those responses were categorized as visible minority. Visible minority refers to whether a person is a visible minority or not, as defined by the Employment Equity Act. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”.

# Findings from the Halton Youth Impact Survey

This bulletin explores youth experiences of discrimination, homelessness, and food security. We highlight some differences between youth of diverse identities and backgrounds\* as a way to build awareness of inequities that may impact the lives of young people living in Halton. The summary below is intended as a conversation starter. It is one more piece of information to add to what you already know about children, youth, and families in Halton. We hope that it will provide insights on the wellbeing and experiences of our children and youth and build awareness of the needs of young people in Halton.



- **Almost 4 in 10 children and youth reported they experienced discrimination in the last year.**



- **Almost 2 in 10 children and youth reported they had nowhere to live at some point in their lives.**



- **Almost 3 in 10 children and youth experienced some degree of food insecurity in the past 12 months.**

- **Children and youth impacted by food insecurity are less likely to have regular opportunities to share a meal where adults and children or youth are together.**



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\* Statistical differences between groups were tested using Poisson regressions including gender and age as control. The threshold for statistically significant differences was  $p < 0.05$ .

# Family life and safety in Halton: the numbers

## Discrimination

In 2019 UNICEF<sup>1</sup> reported that 35% of youth in Canada experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in the past five years.

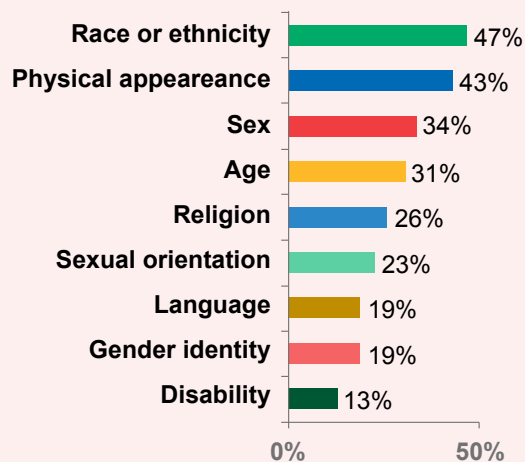
Similarly, 37% of young people participating in the Halton Youth Impact Survey experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in the previous year. The most frequently reported reason for discrimination was race or ethnicity. Both Indigenous and other racialized children and youth<sup>2</sup> were more likely to report experiencing discrimination than their non-racialized peers.

Young people with a chronic illness or disability were twice as likely to report experiencing discrimination than those not living with a chronic illness or disability. However, “disability” was one of the least mentioned causes for discrimination, even within this group.<sup>3</sup>

Youth reporting experiences of discrimination were less likely to have a strong sense of community belonging. They were more likely to report low community support and higher levels of social isolation. They were also more likely to feel lonely compared to their peers who had not reported discrimination.

### Reasons for unfair treatment reported by children and youth experiencing discrimination

“In the past year, have you experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly by others in your community because of...”



Our Kids Network (2021). Halton youth Impact Survey. In partnership with UNICEF CANADA and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.

1 UNICEF Canada (2019). Where Does Canada Stand? The Canadian Index of Child and Youth Well-being, 2019 Baseline Report. UNICEF Canada.

2 Black, East Asian, and Southeast Asian.

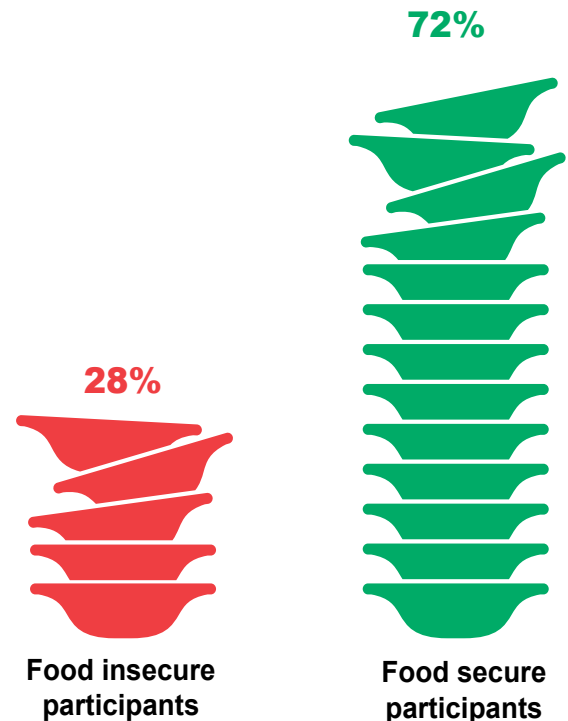
3 Among children and youth living with a chronic illness or disability who had experienced discrimination, 28% reported they were discriminated because of a disability.

# Food insecurity

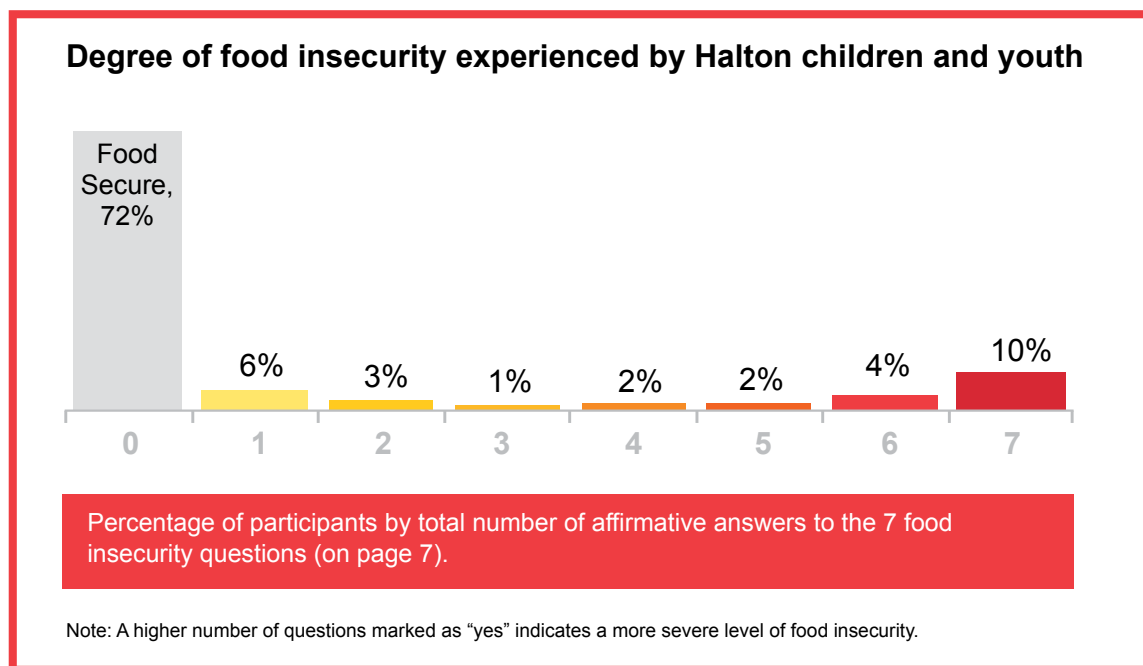
**Food insecurity is the lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. It is a serious public health problem, and a matter of public policy.<sup>4</sup>**

Results from Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey show that 16% of households in Ontario experienced some degree of food insecurity in 2021. Of the total number of children and youth under 18 in the surveyed households, almost 21% were food insecure.<sup>5</sup> Whereas the Halton Youth Impact Survey results are not directly comparable to those of the Canadian Income Survey,<sup>6</sup> the National numbers highlight the importance and magnitude of this problem.

Twenty-eight percent of children and youth in Halton report experiencing some degree of food insecurity. This percentage is higher for some children and youth. For example, there is a higher percentage of food-insecure children and youth among Indigenous participants and among participants who perceived their families as not well-off. As food prices continue to rise, these numbers may underestimate the current experience of some families in Halton.



*Our Kids Network (2021). Halton youth Impact Survey. In partnership with UNICEF CANADA and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.*



*Our Kids Network (2021). Halton youth Impact Survey. In partnership with UNICEF CANADA and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.*

4 Feeding America (2022). What is food insecurity in America? <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/>

5 Fafard St-Germain, A.A. (2022) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

6 The Halton Youth Impact Survey assessed food insecurity with 7 questions. Participants in our survey were considered food insecure if they had at least one affirmative answer to the 7 questions. Whereas the Halton Youth Impact survey collected data on each respondent, the Canadian Income Survey collected data on households – a closer estimate would be the number of children and youth under 18 that are food insecure in Canada. However, the methodologies are different, and the highly diverse Halton Youth Impact Survey sample may also impact the overall food insecurity ratio reported here.

## Types of food insecurity experienced by Halton youth: Percentage of children and youth answering ‘yes’ to each food security question.

FOOD SECURITY QUESTIONS IN THE HALTON YOUTH IMPACT SURVEY	%
Goes to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food at home	21%
I ate only a few kinds of low-cost foods because we could not buy food	20%
Our family could not afford the food for more balanced meals	18%
I ate smaller meals because there was not enough money for food	17%
I did not eat enough because there was not enough money for food	16%
I skipped meals because there was not enough money for food	16%
I did not eat for the whole day because there was not enough money for food	15%

*Our Kids Network (2021). Halton Youth Impact Survey. In partnership with UNICEF CANADA and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing*

Food security questions are organized from least to most severe food insecurity. The order is based on *Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2021*, by V. Tarasuk, T. Li and A.A. Fafard St-Germain, 2022. Data cannot be directly compared as methodologies and questionnaires are different. Participants impacted by food insecurity could have affirmative answers in more than one item.

## Did you know?

- In the Halton Youth Impact Survey, children and youth who experienced discrimination were twice as likely to report some degree of food insecurity compared to their peers who did not.
- As of October/November 2020, while 13% of Halton adults participating in a Public Health survey said they could not afford balanced meals, only 2% had accessed any community food program in the previous month.<sup>7</sup>
- Canada-wide, those most at risk are households with low incomes and limited assets. Indigenous-led households are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, as are those led by female lone-parents and those reliant on public income supports (other than public pensions).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Halton Region (2022). Incidental Impacts of COVID-19 series: Food insecurity. Retrieved from <https://www.halton.ca/Document/Health-Statistics/Incidental-impacts-of-COVID-19-series-Food-insecu/Incidental-impacts-of-COVID-19-series-Food-insecu>

<sup>8</sup> Fafard St-Germain, A.A. (2022)

# Lifetime homelessness

According to Statistics Canada, there are many definitions of homelessness. However, it is mostly described as a situation where individuals or families live without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or have the immediate prospect, means, and ability to acquire it.

Homelessness can be defined as **unsheltered homelessness**, which includes living on the streets, living in places not appropriate for human habitation, or staying in shelters. Living temporarily with family or friends due to not having a place to live is known as **hidden homelessness**.

Homelessness is a relevant social concern in Canada. In 2018, 3% of the persons<sup>9</sup> making housing decisions for their household had experienced unsheltered homelessness, while 15% had experienced hidden homelessness.<sup>10</sup>

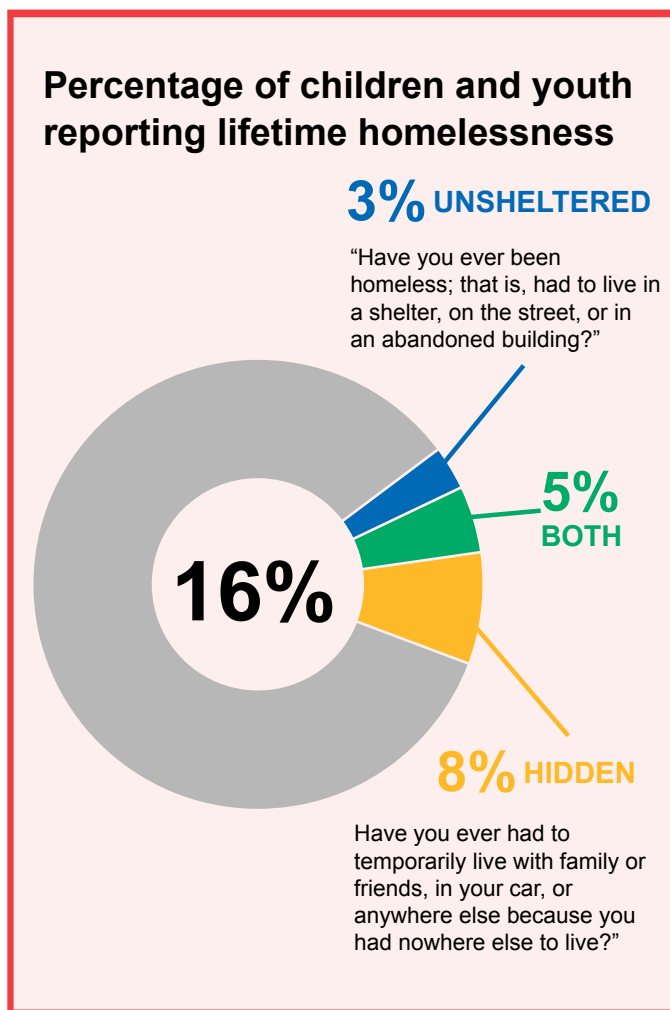
The Halton Youth Impact Survey assessed lifetime homelessness, which captures whether participants had ever experienced homelessness (sheltered or hidden), even if that is not their current situation. Lifetime homelessness has been connected to poorer socioeconomic and health outcomes.<sup>11</sup>

In Halton, 16% percent of respondents had experienced some form of homelessness at some point in their lives. Similar to the Canadian Housing Survey results, in Halton, Indigenous children and youth were more likely to have been affected by homelessness at some point in their lives compared to non-racialized participants.

Other racialized children and youth were also more likely to report lifetime homelessness compared to their non-racialized peers.

Young people living with a chronic illness or disability, compared to their peers not living with a chronic illness or disability, were more likely to report experiencing homelessness.

Young people reporting lifetime homelessness were less likely to report a strong sense of belonging to their community and more likely to report low community support compared to their peers who had not experienced homelessness.



Our Kids Network (2021). Halton youth Impact Survey. In partnership with UNICEF CANADA and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.

9 15 years old and above

10 Uppal, S. (2022). “A portrait of Canadians who have been homeless.” Insights on Canadian Society. March. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X; Statistics Canada, Canadian Housing Survey, 2018.

11 Uppal, S. (2022).



## Did you know?

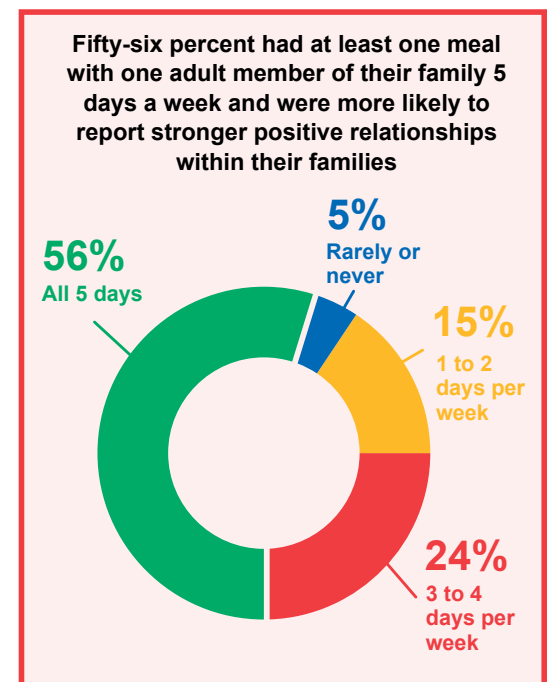
- Children and youth who experienced discrimination were also 4 times as likely to report lifetime homelessness compared to their peers who did not.
- Discrimination impacts the options and choices of individuals in their daily lives, such as employment, housing, and even access to services. Discrimination can be a precursor of homelessness, and in time, people may be discriminated against for being homeless.<sup>12</sup>
- In 2022 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed “deep concern” about structural discrimination in Canada against Indigenous and African-Canadian children and its impact on their access to basic standards of living.<sup>13</sup>

## Family Life

Family meals are an essential aspect of family life. Eating together can improve relationships and give a sense of stability and connectedness. In the Halton Youth Impact Survey, children and youth who had at least one meal with one adult member of their family 5 days a week were more likely to report stronger positive relationships within their families.

However, to ensure quality time together, families need strong support systems that secure their basic needs. When basic needs are met, families can more easily enjoy quality time together, which is important for building and maintaining strong family connections and home life. For example, children and youth reporting food insecurity were around 60% less likely to enjoy regular meals<sup>14</sup> with at least one adult from their families.

Young people working full-time or part-time were also less likely to have regular meals with at least one adult from their families.



*Our Kids Network (2021). Halton youth Impact Survey. In partnership with UNICEF CANADA and the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.*

<sup>12</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (2015). Discrimination & Homelessness. The Homeless Hub. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/discrimination-homelessness>

<sup>13</sup> Committee on the Rights of the Child (June 9,2022). Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth reports of Canada. Retrieved from CRC/C/CAN/CO/5-6 (ohchr.org)

<sup>14</sup> One meal with at least one adult from their family 5 days a week



# What next? Data to action

The findings from the HYIS provide our community with new, comprehensive data, informed by a youth engagement strategy, and validated by youth from across Halton. Now, it is time for organizations serving youth in Halton to move the data into action.

**How can we support families in Halton to create conditions that promote positive development for all children and youth?**

## STEP 1

Consider the conditions we want to see for strong and stable families and safe children and youth in Halton. The findings from the HYIS suggest three key conditions we should strive for:

- Reliable and consistent access to nutritious and healthy foods and stable, affordable housing for all families
- Inclusive and welcoming spaces.
- Safe and supportive communities.

## STEP 2

Explore and share the findings. More data can be found on the [OKN Data Portal](#).

Have conversations about what the results mean, and how we can work together in Halton to respond to these findings.

## STEP 3

This Data Action Bulletin posits a series of questions, or Data Actions, to guide discussion and, ultimately, action at your organization. We encourage you to work through and discuss each question as a group. It is our vision that the conversations catalyzed by these questions will be unique to your organization and create pathways for mobilizing the data within your organization.

How we achieve these outcomes will be determined by the actions we take, individually in our respective work, and collaboratively as a community. The Data Actions below are designed to guide discussion at your organization.

## Reliable and consistent access to nutritious and healthy foods and stable, affordable housing for all families

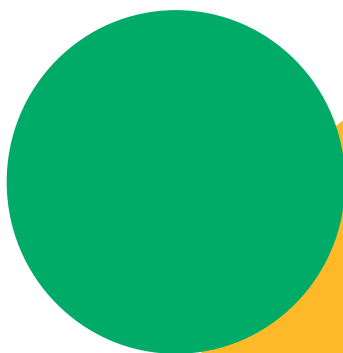
- Are you aware of the existing resources and supports available in your community, and in what ways can you make this information easy to access and share with your clients and staff?
- In what ways can you or your organization help advocate for families that are facing challenges meeting their basic needs?
- Who are the potential partners (people and agencies, public and private) who have a role to play in doing better?

## Inclusive and welcoming spaces

- What would it take to do better? Are there promising practices and initiatives that have worked in other places outside your community?
- In the work you do, are there any barriers that may prevent children, youth and families from accessing services and resources? How can you or your organization help minimize these barriers?
- What processes can you implement in your work to avoid any unconscious or unchecked biases?

## Safe and supportive communities

- What activities, actions and policies can you or your organization implement to ensure that all children, youth and families feel welcomed and safe in the work you do?
- Are there opportunities to promote and support existing initiatives that foster networks of belonging and solidarity for families, children and youth who may need them?
- What processes can you implement in your work to ensure that all children, youth and their families can have their voices heard?



# Turning the Curve: Recommendations for Action

Ultimately, every person will have their own perspective on how well Halton youth are doing and some issues will be perceived as more important than others. Regardless of any perspective, the next step is to share the insights gained from this bulletin and begin conversations about what the results mean and how we might respond. Based on these conversations, you will determine which issues you need to act upon.

This is referred to as “turning the curve”. In other words, you want to take action on indicators that reflect a negative trend in order to turn the trend or curve in a more positive direction. The following is an easy tool designed by Mark Friedman, developer of Results Based Accountability ([www.raguide.org](http://www.raguide.org)), that can move you from talk to action in 45 to 60 minutes. We suggest you use this tool as a way to discuss the results in this bulletin and the detailed data available online at [www.ourkidsnetwork.ca](http://www.ourkidsnetwork.ca).

## How to get started

01

It doesn't matter where you start, just get started! Anywhere leads to everywhere.

02

Start where people are passionate. Create groups where people can work on what they are passionate about.

03

Know “what works”. Evidence-based best practices will help guide you on what could work.

04

Get from talk to action as quickly as possible. Make sure there is an action track to “turn the curve” early in the work.

## Key questions for Turning the Curve



### STORY BEHIND THE BASELINE (TREND)

What are the causes and forces at work? Talking about our experiences and sharing the data help us better understand what's going on in our community and what might work to help us do better.

### PARTNERS



Who are the potential partners (people and agencies, public and private) who have a role to play in doing better?



### WHAT WORKS

What would it take to do better? What has worked in other places outside your community? What does research tell us? The answers should draw on the possible contributions of partners and should involve no-cost or low-cost ideas.

### CRITERIA



What criteria should guide this selection process? Some criteria to think about include: **specificity** (specific action not rhetoric), **leverage** (will it make a big or little difference?), **values** (is it consistent with our personal and community values?), and **reach** (is it feasible and if so, when?).



### STRATEGY, ACTION PLAN AND BUDGET

What action do we propose to take? This should be in the form of a multi-year strategy and action plan laying out what is to be accomplished by when. We can then assign responsibilities and get started.



# Advancing Beyond the Data

As you take the steps to move the data into action, consider reflecting on what we still need to understand.

- Is something missing from these key findings?
- Has your organization identified an area that should be explored further?
- How can we work together to address these knowledge gaps?

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## Limitations

- Open invitation sampling strategy (non-probabilistic).
  - Sample is not necessarily representative of all children and youth living in Halton.
  - It is not possible to determine a response rate.
  - However, considering the geographic coverage and the size of the final sample, it's fair to assume that we have a reasonably good cross-section of children and youth living in Halton.
- A higher degree of diversity within this sample calls for caution when interpreting overall ratios. For more details on the composition of the sample see the [sociodemographic table](#).
- The data are meant to provide a snapshot of youth wellbeing during COVID, and caution should be used when comparing across time.
- While each indicator is important, using multiple indicators as evidence of strengths and needs provides a more comprehensive representation
- This is a self-report survey and several types of response bias have been identified related to self-report surveys. Use caution when interpreting the findings.

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