



RURAL
COMMUNITY
WELLBEING

MARCH

20
26

COMMUNITY WELLBEING REPORT

WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH



PREPARED BY:



PREPARED FOR: WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH



RURAL
COMMUNITY
WELLBEING

ABOUT

ROI has developed a dashboard that displays wellbeing indicators for communities across Ontario. The dashboard was developed in collaboration with project partners, including the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and EcoCanada.

Dashboard development and indicator selection were informed through engagement with a focus group of rural data champions whose involvement was integral to this process.

ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#) improves access to data and evidence for local decision making. The information on the dashboard and in this report can help communities:

- establish baselines
- identify priorities for change and research
- share stories and celebrate successes
- reveal data gaps for decision making
- monitor progress over time in future reports

This report was prepared using indicators and data from ROI's Community Wellbeing Dashboard. See the [website](#) for definitions, data sources, and references.

This report includes commentary that contextualizes and assesses wellbeing based on the experiences and insights of people who live and work in this community.

Since this is the first Community Wellbeing Report for Wellington County and Guelph, it can serve as a baseline against which progress on policies or programs can be tracked. For context and comparison, indicator values are presented for the eight communities of the county including Centre Wellington, Erin, Guelph, Guelph/Eramosa, Mapleton, Minto, Puslinch, and Wellington North along with overall values for rural Ontario.



Building
**vision, voice
& leadership**



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SUMMARY

1. **In 2021, Wellington County and Guelph had a population of 241,026 residents.** The City of Guelph is the largest population centre, accounting for approximately 60% of the region's total population.
2. **Between 2016 and 2021, the population** of Wellington County and Guelph **grew by 8.2%**, outpacing growth in both rural Ontario and the province overall. Population growth was strongest in the City of Guelph (9.1%), while Wellington County (excluding Guelph) grew by 7.0% over the same period.
3. The **population dependency ratio in 2021 was 54 economically dependent people per 100 working-age residents** across Wellington County and Guelph. This ratio was lower in the City of Guelph (49) and higher in Wellington County excluding Guelph (61), reflecting differences in age structure between urban and rural communities.
4. The **median age** of residents in Wellington County and Guelph was **43 years in 2021**. Guelph had a younger population, with a median age of 38, compared to 44 years in Wellington County excluding Guelph.
5. **In 2021, 8% of households** in Wellington County and Guelph were **classified as low income**. This rate was consistent in the City of Guelph (8%) and slightly lower in Wellington County excluding Guelph (7%).
6. Local employment patterns vary significantly across the region. Overall, **56% of residents** in Wellington County and Guelph **worked within their community of residence in 2021**. The rate was substantially higher in Guelph (70%) and much lower in Wellington County excluding Guelph (35%), highlighting strong commuting flows from rural areas to nearby urban centres.
7. Access to high-speed internet is widespread across the region. **In 2024, 98% of households** in Wellington County and Guelph **had access to broadband internet at speeds of 50/10 Mbps**. Access was universal in the City of Guelph (100%) and remained high in Wellington County excluding Guelph (96%).
8. Wellington County and Guelph are served by **185 health facilities, including six hospitals**, supporting access to health services across both urban and rural communities.
9. There are **28 arts and cultural facilities** located throughout Wellington County and Guelph, contributing to community life and cultural engagement across the region.
10. Educational attainment levels are high. **In 2021, 89% of residents aged 25–64 had completed at least a high school diploma**, and 64% had attained some form of post-secondary education



WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH COMMUNITY CONTEXT

COMMUNITY LOCATION, TYPE AND CLASSIFICATION

Located in south-western Ontario, the census division of Wellington County and Guelph is situated approximately 50 kilometres southwest of Toronto and directly northeast of the Kitchener–Waterloo region.

The area is comprised of three urban municipalities and five rural municipalities. Apart from the City of Guelph, Wellington County operates under a two-tier municipal governance structure, in which many local services are delivered by lower-tier municipalities, while broader services, such as social services, land-use planning, and county-wide initiatives, are administered at the upper tier. The City of Guelph is the only census metropolitan area in the region and functions as a separated single-tier municipality.

The Government of Ontario recognizes seven lower-tier municipalities within Wellington County: Centre Wellington, Erin, Guelph/Eramosa, Mapleton, Minto, Puslinch, and Wellington North. Together with the City of Guelph, these eight municipalities comprise the broader geographic area commonly referred to as Wellington.

The Rural Well-Being Dashboard classifies communities based on geographic boundaries. As a result, selecting “Wellington County” within the dashboard includes data for the City of Guelph. For clarity and consistency, this report refers to the seven lower-tier municipalities as “Wellington County (excluding Guelph)” and to the full geographic area as “Wellington County and Guelph.”

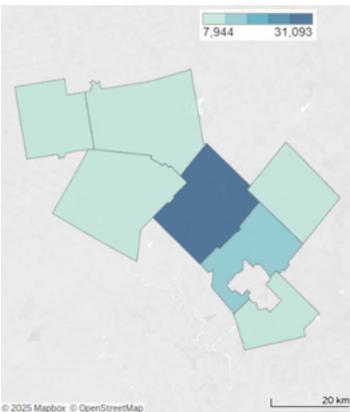
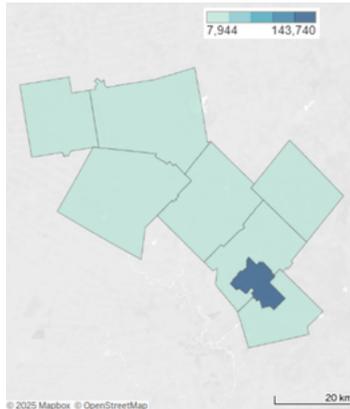
POPULATION

In 2021, 241,026 people lived in Wellington County and Guelph. The City of Guelph is the region’s largest population centre, accounting for approximately 60% of the total population.

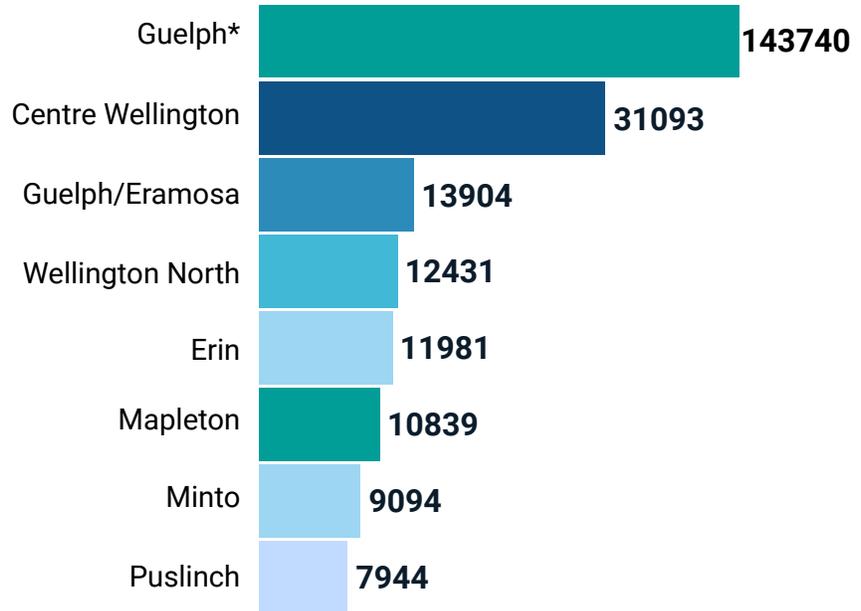
Among the lower-tier municipalities, Centre Wellington has the next largest population, with 31,093 residents, nearly three times the population of Guelph/Eramosa, the second most populous lower-tier municipality in the county.



241,026
people live in
Wellington County
and Guelph



POPULATION IN 2021 IN THE COMMUNITIES OF WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH



**Please note the scale has been adjusted for Guelph in order to show the difference in population between the remaining communities.*

POPULATION DENSITY

In 2021, the population density of Wellington County and Guelph was 90 people per square kilometre. When the City of Guelph is excluded, population density in Wellington County alone was 38 people per square kilometre. In both cases, population density is higher than the rural Ontario average of 3 people per square kilometre.

90 people per km²



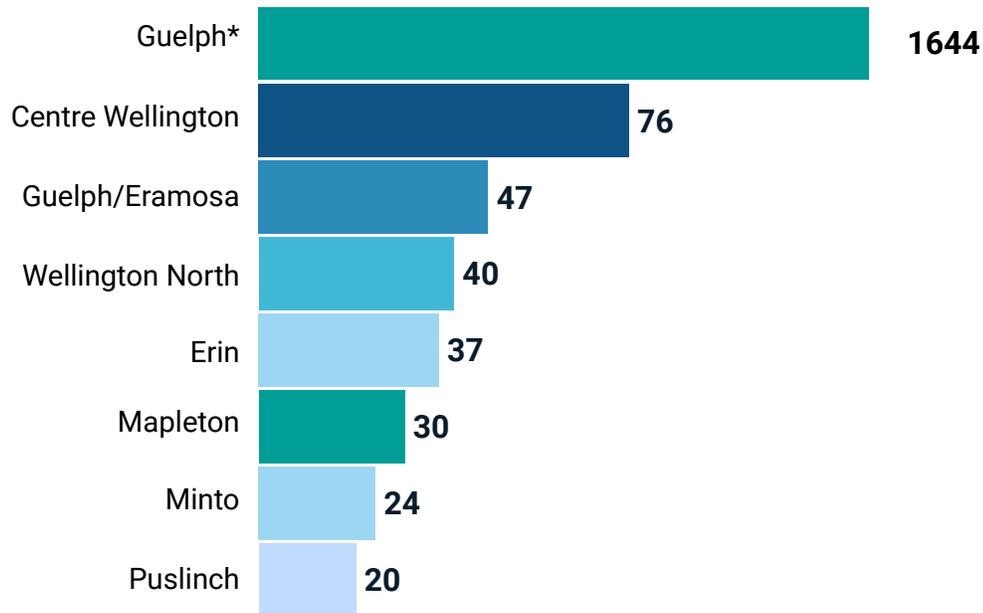
Mapleton, which accounts for approximately 20% of the total land area of Wellington County and Guelph, is both the largest municipality by land area and the least densely populated community in the region.

Although Puslinch has the smallest population among Wellington County municipalities, it ranks as the fourth most densely populated, reflecting differences in land area and settlement patterns across the county.





DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATOR: POPULATION DENSITY



**Please note the scale has been adjusted for Guelph in order to show the difference in population between the remaining communities.*

POPULATION CHANGE

Between 2016 and 2021, all communities in Wellington County and Guelph experienced population growth. Overall, the region’s population increased by 8.2%, exceeding growth rates observed in rural Ontario (5%) and Ontario as a whole (6%).

Population growth was strongest in the two most populous communities: Centre Wellington, which grew by 10.3%, and the City of Guelph, which increased by 9.1%. The other urban municipalities, Guelph/Eramosa and Puslinch, also recorded notable population increases, with growth rates of 8.2–8.3% over the same period.

Wellington County & Guelph population growth



Centre Wellington population growth

10.3%

City of Guelph population growth

9.1%





POPULATION DEPENDENCY RATIO

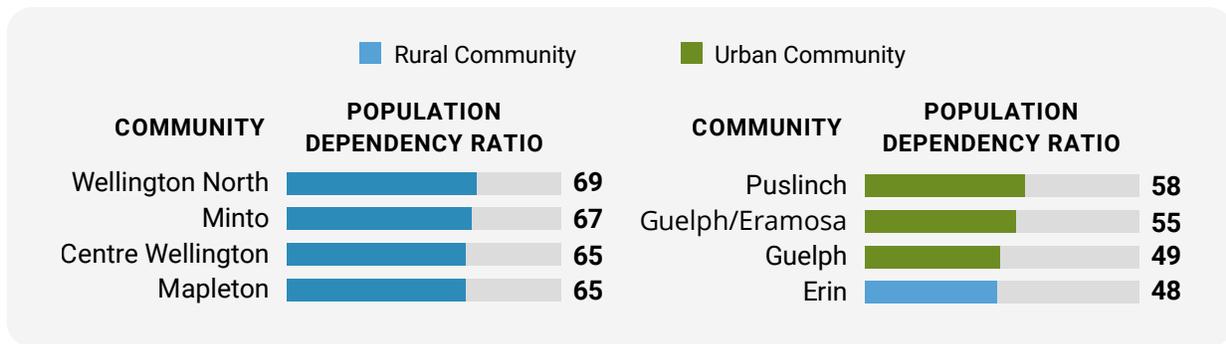
The population dependency ratio is the number of economically dependent people per 100 working age people in 2021. The population dependency ratio in rural Ontario is 66, and in urban Ontario is 50 or 52 in Ontario overall. Similarly, Wellington County and Guelph have a population dependency ratio of 54.

54:100



RURAL ONTARIO 66:100

URBAN ONTARIO 50:100



MEDIAN AGE

The official 2021 Census median age for Wellington County is 40 years. Median age varies across lower-tier municipalities, with the youngest median age in Mapleton (32 years) and the highest in Puslinch (49 years). County-level median age is reported directly from official Census geography and is not derived by aggregating municipal medians.

Wellington County Median Age

40

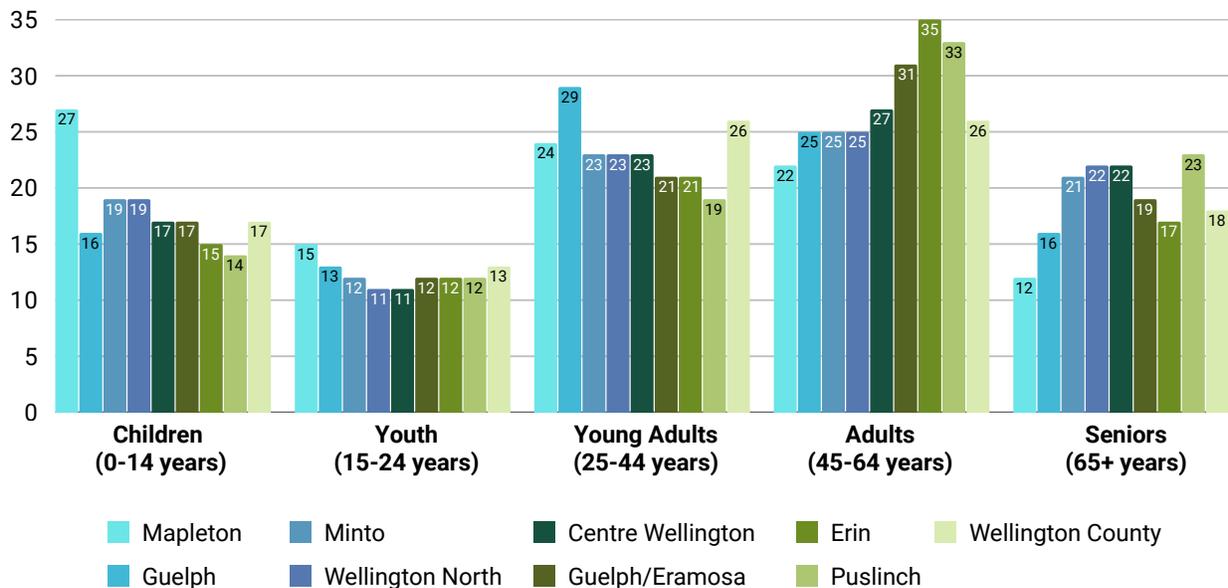


| Communities | Median Age |
|-------------------|------------|
| Mapleton | 32 |
| Guelph | 38 |
| Minto | 41 |
| Wellington North | 42 |
| Centre Wellington | 44 |
| Guelph/Eramosa | 45 |
| Erin | 47 |
| Puslinch | 49 |
| Rural Ontario | 50 |
| Urban Ontario | 44 |





AGE DISTRIBUTION IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH

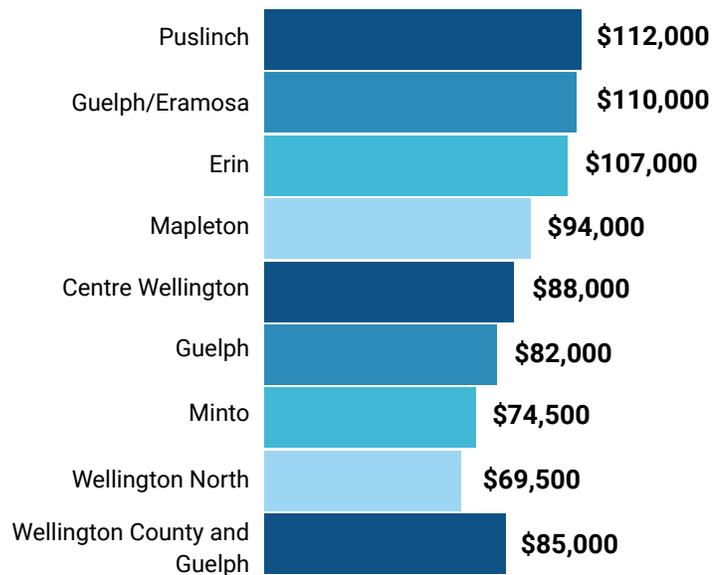


MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The median after-tax household income in 2020 is higher than the median household income in rural Ontario (\$ 71,500) for almost all the communities of the county, except for Wellington North. Wellington North is just below the provincial median of \$72,000.

The median, after-tax household income is higher in the urban communities of Puslinch and Guelph/Eramosa, at \$112,000 and \$110,000 respectively. The town of Erin also has a high median household income of \$107,000.

MEDIAN AFTER-TAX HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH, AND IN ONTARIO



\$85,000

Median household income in Wellington County & Guelph



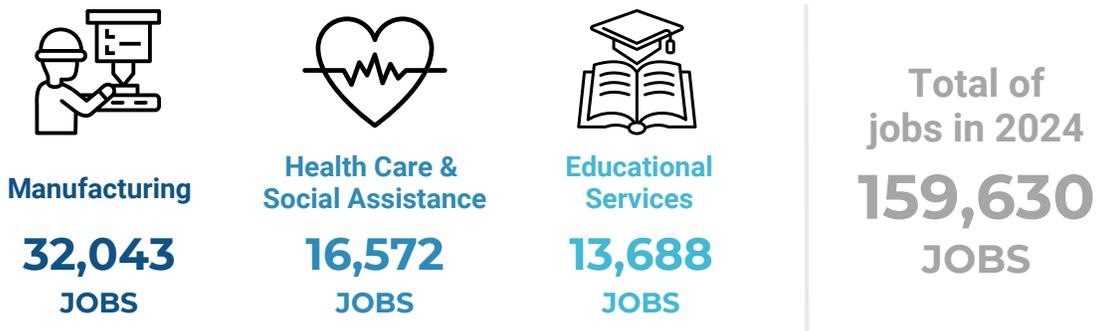


TOP EMPLOYMENT INDUSTRIES

In 2024, the three largest employment industries in Wellington County and Guelph were manufacturing, health care and social assistance, and educational services.

The City of Guelph accounts for approximately 65% of total employment in the region and therefore has a substantial influence on overall industry patterns. As a result, examining industry composition excluding the City of Guelph provides additional insight into employment trends across the rest of Wellington County.

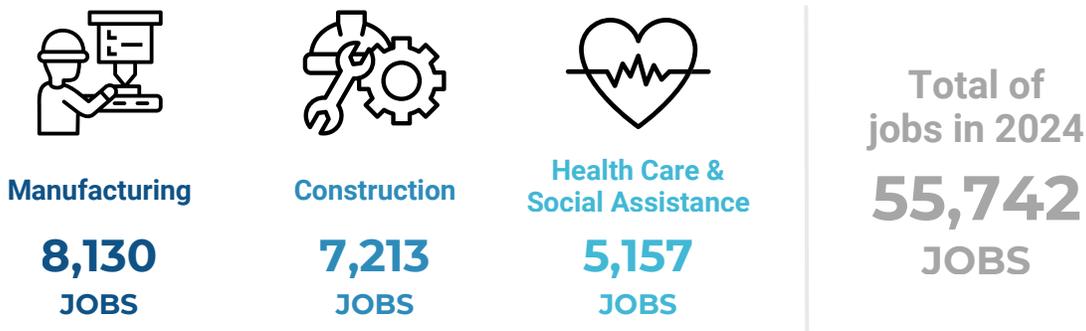
TOP 3 JOBS IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH IN 2024 (FOR EMPLOYED AND SELF-EMPLOYED)



In 2024, the three largest employment industries in Wellington County (excluding Guelph) were manufacturing, construction, and health care and social assistance.

Outside of the City of Guelph, employment is most concentrated in Centre Wellington, with 16,742 jobs, followed by Guelph/Eramosa (8,512 jobs). Puslinch (7,903 jobs) and Wellington North (6,886 jobs) also account for a significant share of employment within the county.

TOP 3 JOBS IN WELLINGTON COUNTY (EXCLUDING GUELPH) IN 2022 (FOR EMPLOYED AND SELF-EMPLOYED)





POPULATION DIVERSITY

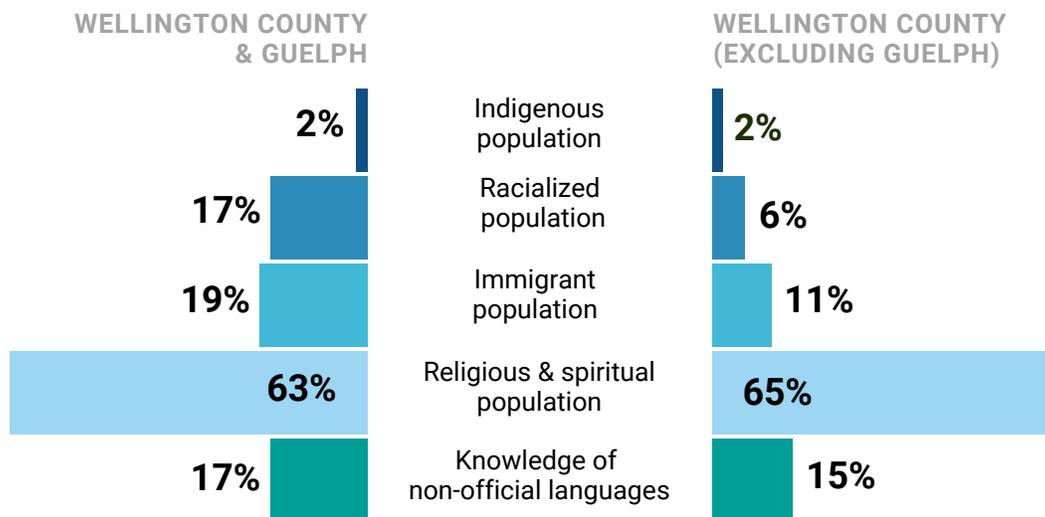
Overall, population diversity is higher when the City of Guelph is included in the analysis.

When examining Wellington County excluding Guelph, diversity indicators are nevertheless consistently higher than those observed in rural Ontario across all measured dimensions. The largest differences are evident in the proportion of the racialized population, immigrant population, and residents with knowledge of non-official languages, which exceed rural Ontario levels (4%, 8%, and 9%, respectively).

High
Population
diversity



POPULATION DIVERSITY IN WELLINGTON COUNTY, INCLUDING AND EXCLUDING GUELPH





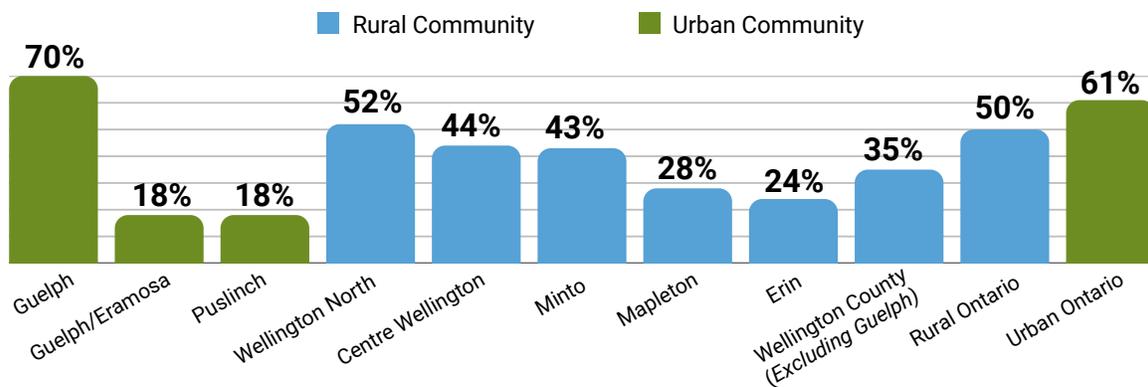
ECONOMICS

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

The local employment is high in the urban community of Guelph. 70% of the inhabitants of Guelph work within the Guelph community. However, for the rest of the county, the rate of local employment is low, with a rate of 35% when excluding Guelph.

The lowest rates are observed in Guelph/Eramosa and Puslinch, both at 18%. These two communities are classified as urban. Under this classification, urban areas include census agglomerations, defined as areas with a high degree of integration with a census metropolitan area based on commuting flows.

LOCAL EMPLOYMENT IN 2021 IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND OVERALL VALUES



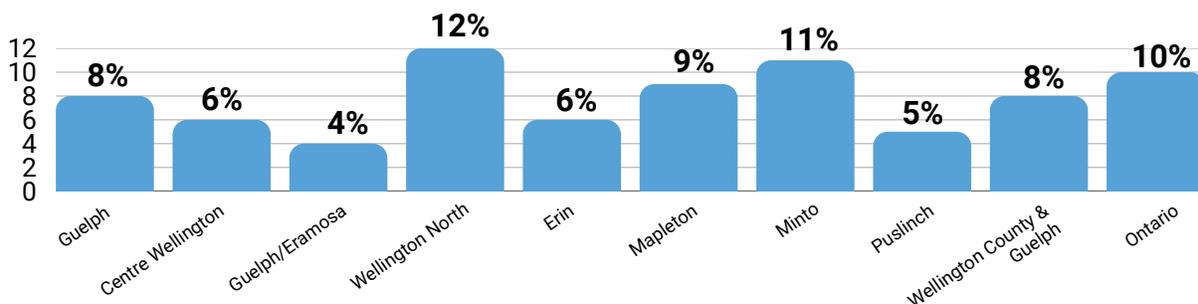
LOW-INCOME MEASURE

The low-income measure is relative to Ontario's value (10%) and rural Ontario's (11%) for all the rural communities in the county.

Note that the communities of Guelph/ Eramosa and Puslinch have a better rate, respectively at 4% and 5%.

LOW-INCOME MEASURE IN 2021 IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH, AND ONTARIO

The communities are in order from the most populated to the least populated.

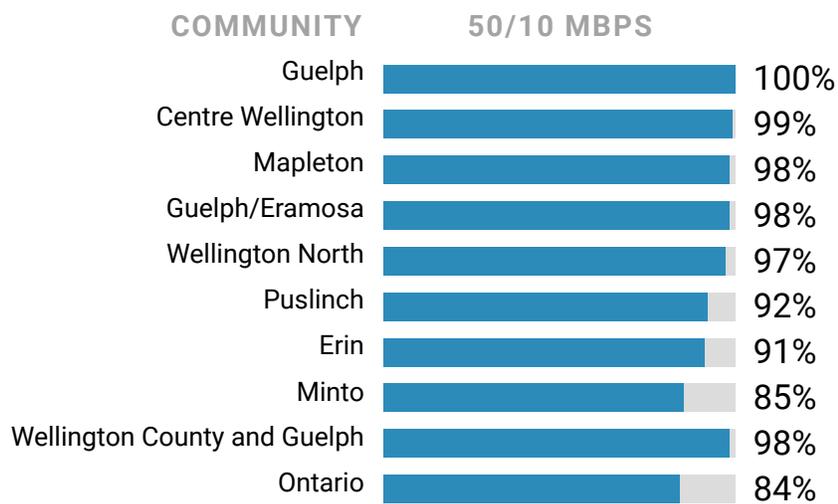


INTERNET

In the township of Wellington North, 1% of the population has no access to internet; the rest of the population of the county has access to internet.

Overall, in the county there is particularly good access to broadband internet, with a rate above 97% for five communities out of eight. The town of Minto has a lower rate of broadband internet of 85%, but it is equivalent to the value for rural Ontario at 84%.

ACCESS TO BROADBAND INTERNET IN 2024 IN THE COMMUNITIES OF WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH





HOUSING

CORE HOUSING NEED

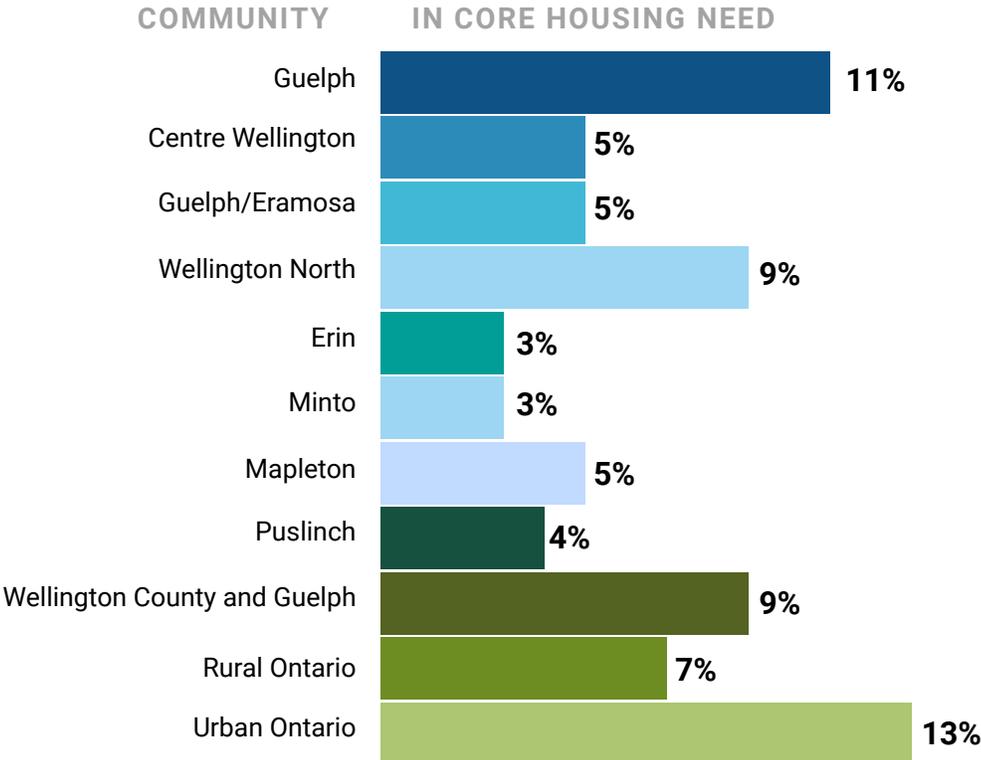
The core housing need indicator represents the proportion of households that falls below at least one of the indicator thresholds for housing adequacy, affordability or suitability, and would have to spend 30% or more of its total before-tax income to pay the median rent of alternative local housing that is acceptable.

Similar to the situation in Ontario overall, the core housing needs are higher in the urban community of Guelph than in the rest of the county and thus drives up the percentage for the whole county.

The township of Wellington North reports a high rate of core housing needs of 9%, higher than the rural Ontario average.

PROPORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CORE HOUSING NEEDS IN 2021 IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH

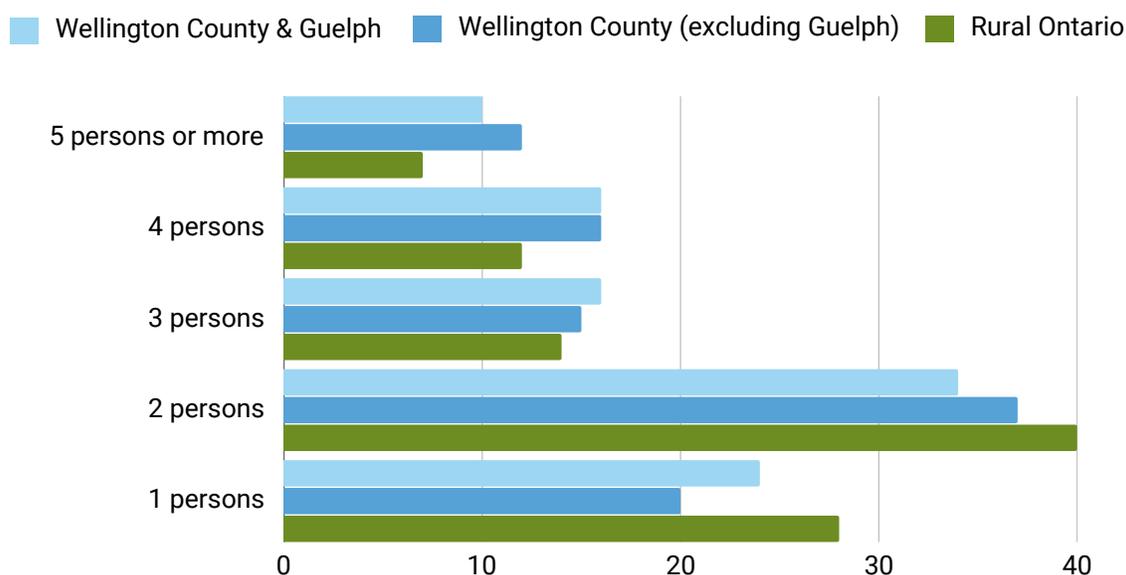
Organized by the number of households in the community, from the highest number of households (top) to the lowest number (bottom)



HOUSEHOLD TYPE

In 2021, two-person households accounted for 34% of all households in Wellington County and Guelph. Compared to rural Ontario, the region has a lower proportion of one and two-person households and a higher proportion of households with three or more persons, indicating a greater prevalence of larger household sizes.

PERCENTAGE OF EACH HOUSEHOLD SIZE IN THE TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS IN WELLINGTON COUNTY (INCLUDING AND EXCLUDING GUELPH) AND RURAL ONTARIO



Household type and after-tax income indicators are not directly comparable, as they are derived from different Census household classifications.

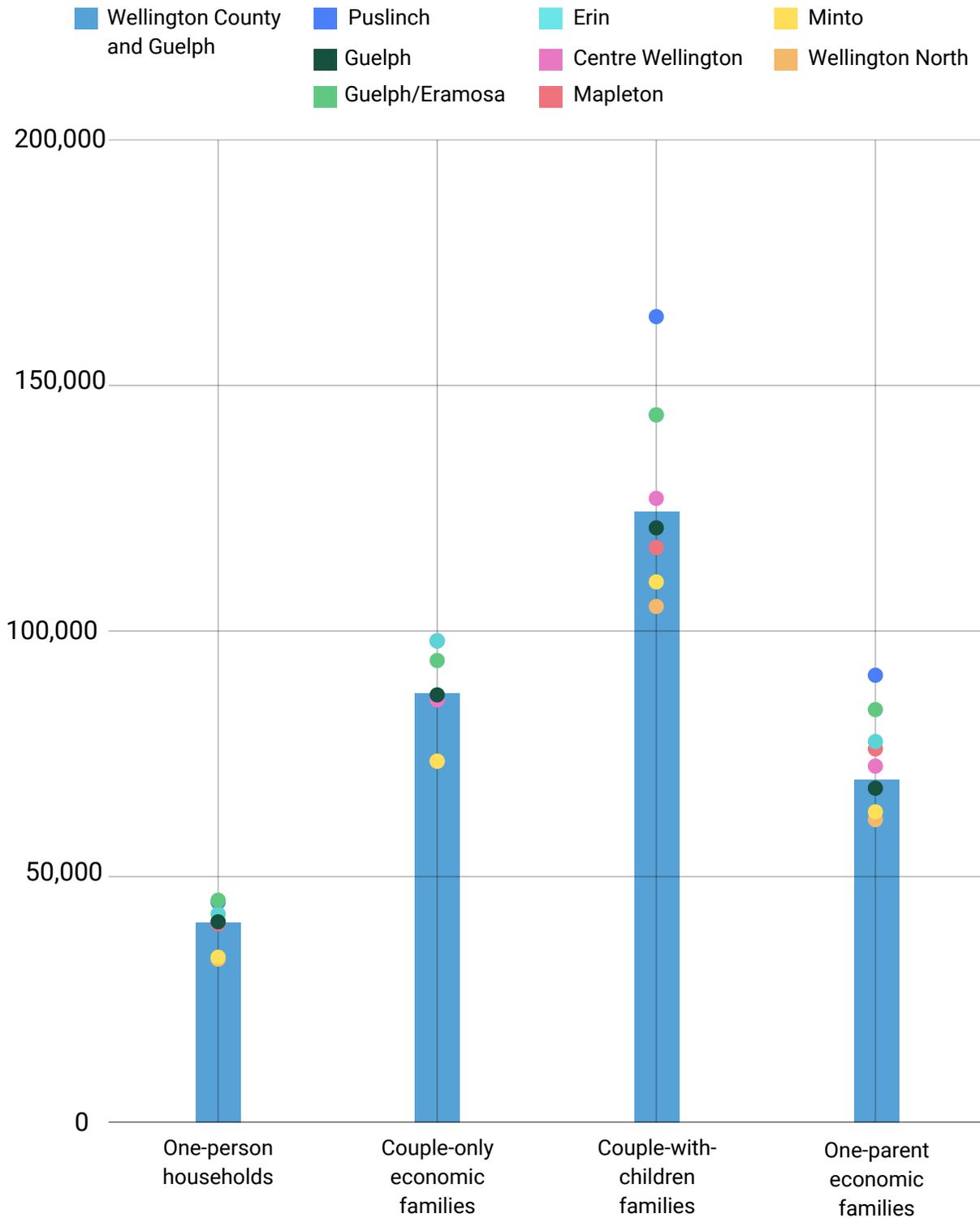
Nevertheless, median after-tax income for households and families provides important insight into the economic conditions of the population. This analysis examines median after-tax income for one-person households, as well as for the following family types: couple only families, couple families with children, and one parent families.

Across all household and family types, median after-tax incomes are lowest in Wellington North and Minto, where households and families report lower incomes than those observed in other communities within the region.

In contrast, communities bordering the City of Guelph, Guelph/Eramosa and Puslinch, as well as the Town of Erin, report higher median after-tax incomes for one-person households and across the family types examined.

MEDIAN AFTER-TAX INCOME OF DIFFERENT HOUSEHOLD TYPES IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH IN 2020

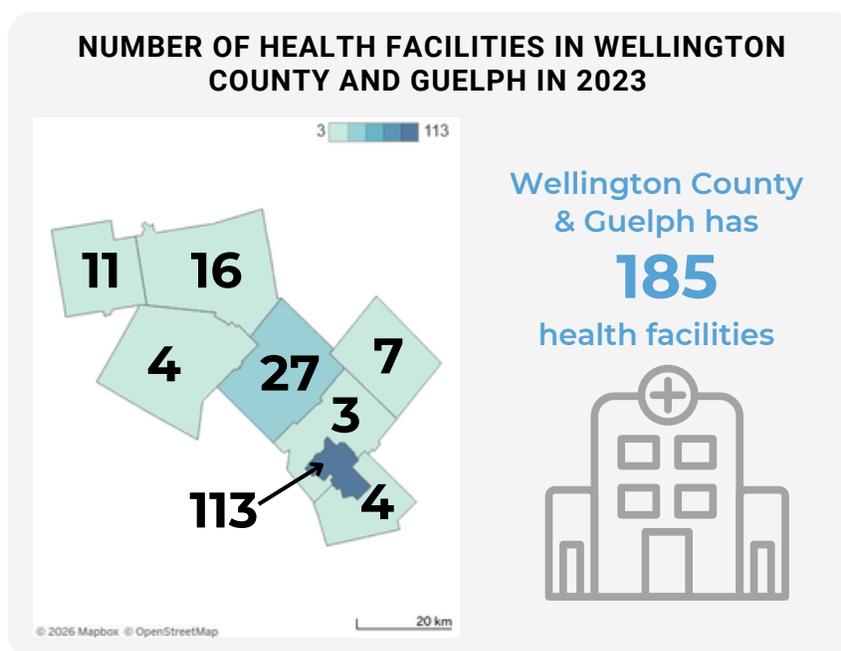
The bar graph shows the median value of Wellington County and Guelph and the values in each of the individual communities.





HEALTH

NUMBER & TYPE OF HEALTH FACILITIES



There is a total of 185 health facilities in Wellington County and Guelph, with 72 outside of the city of Guelph. There are 27 health facilities in the township of Centre Wellington, which ensures better access to the neighboring communities.

Pharmacies are the most common type of health facility in Wellington County and Guelph, with 88 locations across the region. The next most prevalent facilities are retirement homes (18), followed by licensed laboratory and specimen collection centres (13) and long-term care homes (12).

Pharmacies are present in all communities within the county. Other health facilities are more unevenly distributed across the region, including family health teams (located in six of the eight communities), licensed laboratory and specimen collection centres (in five communities), and long-term care homes (also in five communities).

In contrast, several specialized health services are available in only a limited number of communities and are therefore less accessible in rural areas. These include community health centres and HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C programs, which are located exclusively in the City of Guelph; independent health services, found only in Erin and Guelph; support services, located in Wellington North, Erin, and Guelph; and mental health and addiction organizations, which operate in Wellington North, Centre Wellington, and Guelph.

NUMBER OF CALLS FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES & REASONS FOR CALLING

ConnexOntario is a government agency that improves access to services for mental health and substance use. People may call [ConnexOntario](#) for themselves, or on behalf of someone else, such as a family member, friend, or patient.

There was an increase in the number of calls in Guelph around 2017, and another increase between 2022 and 2023. In Centre Wellington, which is the second most populated community, the number of calls increased from 67 in 2021 to 104 in 2022 and stayed at this same level in 2023 (101 calls).

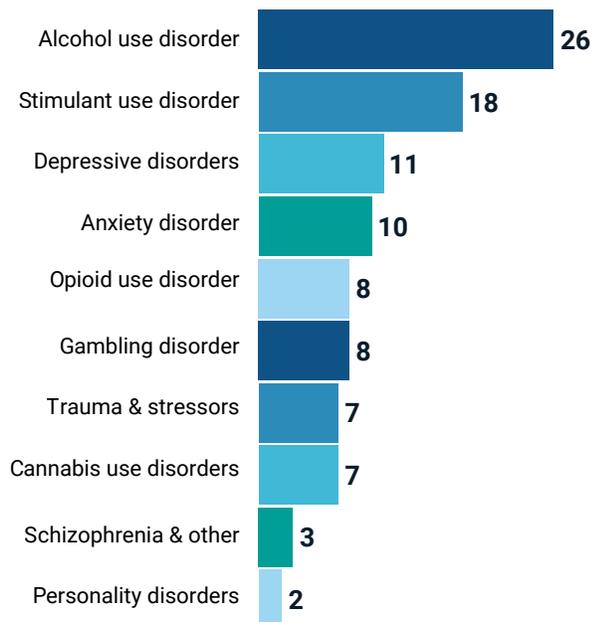
There is no significant increase in the number of calls to ConnexOntario over time in the other communities of Wellington County. In Erin, Guelph/ Eramosa, Wellington North and Minto, the number of calls fluctuates between 15 and 43 depending on the years.

The number of calls is consistently lower in Puslinch and Mapleton, where they are always under 15 calls per year, even though Mapleton is more populated than Minto.

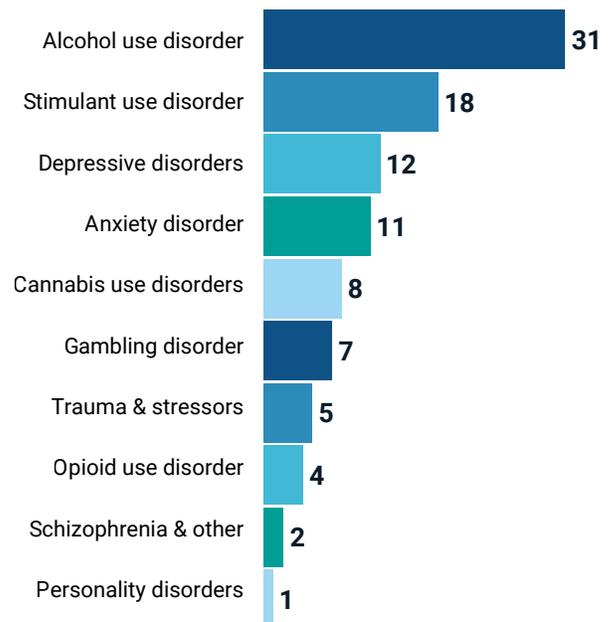
The top 4 reasons for calling ConnexOntario are the same as the ones for Ontario and rural Ontario: Alcohol Use Disorder (26% in Wellington County), stimulant use disorder (18%), depressive disorders (11%) and anxiety disorders (10%).

Note this indicator reports the number of calls; it is a proxy for the number of people suffering from mental health disorders. It does not give indications on whether several people called for the same individual, and may be influenced by whether people have knowledge of the service, trust it, whether calling those services is negatively seen in the community, etc.

MOST COMMON REASONS FOR CALLING CONNEXONTARIO IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH IN 2023



MOST COMMON REASONS FOR CALLING CONNEXONTARIO IN WELLINGTON COUNTY (EXCLUDING GUELPH) IN 2023



WAIT TIMES FOR LONG TERM CARE

Wellington County's long-term care system includes 11 homes ranging in size from 28 to 240 licensed beds. The sector is predominantly for-profit, although several homes operate on a not-for-profit basis, including The Elliott Long Term Care Residence, St. Joseph's Health Centre, and Wellington Terrace Long-Term Care Home. Demand pressures vary considerably across the county, with wait lists ranging from 11 people at Caressant Care Harriston to 923 at St. Joseph's Health Centre in Guelph. The most substantial pressures are concentrated among several of the county's larger homes, particularly St. Joseph's Health Centre (240 beds; 923 on the wait list), The Village of Riverside Glen (192 beds; 920 on the wait list), The Elliott Long Term Care Residence (114 beds; 895 on the wait list), and Wellington Terrace Long-Term Care Home (176 beds; 754 on the wait list). At the same time, some smaller and mid-sized homes, such as Caressant Care Arthur (80 beds; 48 on the wait list), Caressant Care Fergus (87 beds; 61 on the wait list), and Caressant Care Harriston (89 beds; 11 on the wait list), are experiencing comparatively lower levels of demand.

MEDIAN NUMBER OF DAYS WAITED TO MOVE INTO A LONG-TERM CARE HOME (2023/24)

ONTARIO (BENCHMARK)

| Prior Location | Median wait (days) |
|----------------|--------------------|
| All | 121 |
| Community | 200 |
| Hospital | 72 |

WELLINGTON COUNTY (INCLUDING THE CITY OF GUELPH) – LTC HOMES

| LTC home | All (days) | Community (days) | Hospital (days) |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Wellington Terrace LTC Home | 101 | 269 | 46 |
| Caressant Care Arthur | 100 | 141 | 22 |
| Eden House Nursing Home | 56 | 579 | 53 |
| The Elliott Community | 84 | 150 | 44 |
| The Village of Riverside Glen | 109 | 341 | 39 |
| St. Joseph's Health Centre - Guelph | 99 | 137 | 43 |
| Caressant Care Fergus | 38 | 146 | LV |
| Caressant Care Harriston | 41 | 57 | 23 |
| Morrison Park Nursing Home | 227 | LV | LV |
| Royal Terrace | 109 | 154 | 130 |

LV = Number is too small to report

Placed from community = residents placed from assisted living residences, cluster care residences, group homes, private dwellings, retirement homes, and supportive housing.

Placed from hospital = residents placed from acute care hospitals (explicitly excludes placements from rehab, CCC, etc.).

All placements = includes residents placed from hospitals (acute, rehab, CCC, etc.) plus community-type settings.



SOCIETY

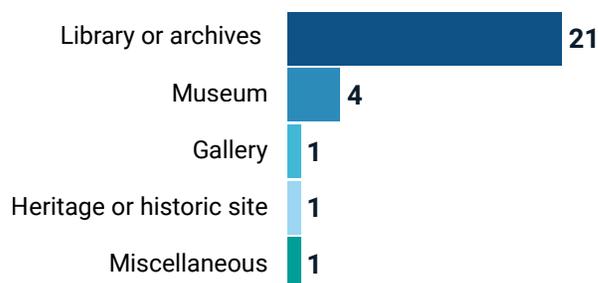
NUMBER & TYPES OF ARTS & CULTURE FACILITIES

In 2020, there were 28 arts and cultural facilities in Wellington County and Guelph. When considering only the communities outside of the City of Guelph, the total was 17 facilities.

Across the region, all communities have library or archival facilities, with the highest number located in Centre Wellington (four) and the lowest in Mapleton and Puslinch (one each). For most communities, libraries and archives represent the primary form of arts and cultural infrastructure. In addition, there is one museum in Erin and one museum in Puslinch, providing limited diversity in cultural offerings outside of Guelph.

Other types of arts and cultural facilities are concentrated in the City of Guelph, requiring residents of surrounding communities to travel to the city to access a broader range of cultural amenities.

NUMBER AND TYPE OF ARTS AND CULTURE FACILITY IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH



HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION ACHIEVED

In 2021, 65.5% of Wellington County residents aged 25 to 64 held a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree, while the corresponding share in Ontario was 67.9%.

In the same age group, 88.9% of Wellington County residents had at least a high school diploma, compared with 90.0% in Ontario.

These figures indicate that Wellington County remains close to the provincial profile, but slightly below Ontario on both postsecondary attainment and high school completion for this age cohort.

These percentages are based on the official 2021 Census Profile published by Statistics Canada for Wellington County and Ontario.



ENVIRONMENT

ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

Ecological Footprint is the area needed to support the human consumption of ecosystem goods and services. The Ecological Footprint for people in Wellington County and Guelph is 6.9 Global hectares per Capita, which lies above the Ontario average of 6.3 global hectares per capita.

Ecological Footprint is influenced by many factors including population, population change, dwelling types and sizes, income, and commuting patterns. With the proximity of the KW region and the GTA, this community has a much larger population density compared to other rural communities in Ontario.

30% of the Ecological footprint can be attributed to consumption associated with personal transport.

| Community | Ecological Footprint (Gha/capita) |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Wellington County and Guelph | 6.9 |
| Wellington County (<i>Excluding Guelph</i>) | 7.0 |
| Rural Ontario | 6.3 |
| Ontario | 6.4 |

BIOCAPACITY

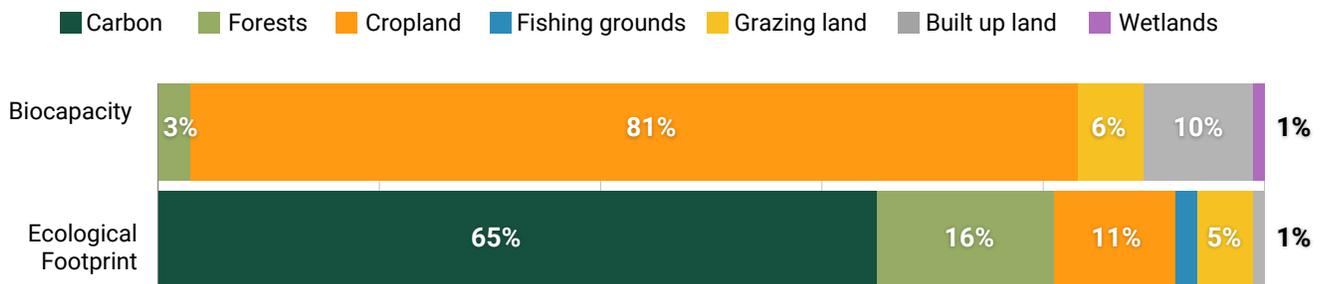
Biocapacity is the ecosystem supply of goods and services in the community. Wellington County and Guelph have lower biocapacity than other communities in Ontario due to its land use patterns. Like other South-western Ontario communities, a majority of the land is used for farming (crop land and grazing), with a high quantity of built-up land. This is due to the favorable soil, temperature, and farming conditions that the region is known for. These same favorable conditions have led to a high amount of displacement of forest and wetland ecosystems. Today, though wetlands and forests are significantly more bio productive than cropland, they account for only 3% of the biocapacity of the region.

| Community | Biocapacity (Gha/capita) |
|---|--------------------------|
| Wellington County and Guelph | -4.0 |
| Wellington County (<i>Excluding Guelph</i>) | -9.5 |
| Rural Ontario | 31.4 |
| Ontario | -6.0 |

Biocapacity and Ecological Footprint accounts are made up of components that reflect different land uses. Rural areas have most of Ontario’s natural land cover and, accordingly, most of Ontario’s productive ecosystems. Cropland makes up most of the bio productive space in this community, accounting for 81% of the region’s biocapacity.

In Wellington County and Guelph, the ecological footprint is larger than available biocapacity, indicating a local biocapacity deficit. Consistent with Ontario community patterns, the carbon component represents the largest share of the ecological footprint.

ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT AND BIOCAPACITY COMPONENTS IN WELLINGTON COUNTY AND GUELPH



BIOCAPACITY BALANCE

Biocapacity balance is calculated as the difference between a community’s biocapacity and its Ecological Footprint. Wellington County and Guelph have a biocapacity balance of -3.0 global hectares for capita, meaning that each person requires 3 more global hectares of bioproductive land to match the pace of consumption. This is significantly different than the Rural Ontario average of 25.1 (closer to the Urban Ontario average of -5.6). Communities consuming resources at an unsustainable rate can reduce their ecological footprint by reducing greenhouse gas emissions to help with climate change mitigation.

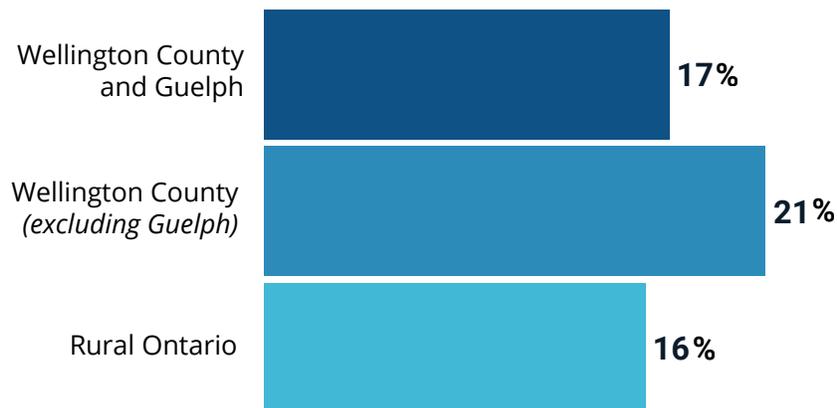
| Community | Biocapacity Balance (Gha/capita) |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Wellington County and Guelph | -3.0 |
| Wellington County (<i>Excluding Guelph</i>) | 2.5 |
| Rural Ontario | 25.1 |
| Ontario | -5.6 |

DURATION OF COMMUTE

In 2021, 90% of commuters who live in Wellington County and Guelph drove to work in a car, truck, or van. Nearly 70% of commuters commuted in less than 30 minutes. In Wellington County (excluding Guelph), only 35% of commuters worked locally. This is much lower than the rural average of 50%. This is likely due to the large amount of economic opportunity present in the neighbouring cities of the county. 17% of commuters had a long commute, in line with the rural Ontario average of 16%.



LONG COMMUTE



CONTACT US

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Questions and Comments?

Contact the Rural Ontario Institute for more information.

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