

LET'S MAKE HEALTH MATTER

The provincial government makes policy decisions that impact the health and well-being of Ontarians.

This document describes issues impacted by provincial decision-making and describes their influence on the health and well-being of residents in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties (HPEC). Evidence-informed solutions are identified to address each issue.

In preparation for the Ontario provincial election to be held June 2, 2022, HPEC residents are encouraged to seek information about the significant impacts that provincial government policy decisions can have on their health and well-being. Please use this information to vote for what is important to you and your family.

A healthy population is crucial to a productive, vibrant and economically strong Ontario – both now, and for generations to come.



Hastings Prince Edward Public Health advocates to promote and protect health and reduce health inequities for all residents. Providing information to the public to assist with informed decision-making related to health and well-being is a key role of public health.

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health is situated and provides services on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee people.

We are committed to providing accessible information to all. To request this document in an alternate format call 613-966-5500; TTY: 711, email accessibility@hpeph.ca, or visit hpePublicHealth.ca.

A letter from the Medical Officer of Health

April 26, 2022

Dear Residents of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties:

The Ontario provincial election is being held on June 2, 2022. The provincial government makes important decisions that will impact your health, and that of your family, both in the short term, and for generations to come.

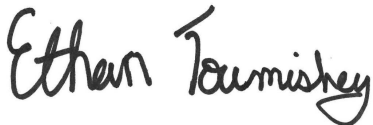
The provincial government plays an important role in shaping policies that affect all aspects of our lives, including our health and well-being. Part of the role of Hastings Prince Edward Public Health is to provide you with information to help make decisions related to your own health, and the health of your community. These include many factors that are not typically linked to health, but contribute significantly to individual and community health over the long term, including:

- Adequate income
- Greater access to mental health services
- Policies to prevent and reduce harms from use of substances, such as alcohol and opioids

This election primer highlights these local issues and provides actions the provincial government can take to improve the health of all Ontarians. During the provincial election campaign, you can encourage government action on these important public health issues by asking questions and casting your vote.

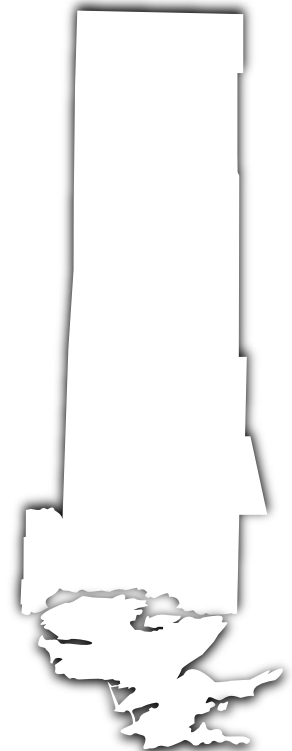
In preparation for the Ontario provincial election, please take the time to learn how provincial decisions can impact your health. You can find more information about important health topics on our website [hpePublicHealth.ca](https://hpepublichealth.ca).

Sincerely,



Ethan Toumishey, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health and CEO

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health issued a correction notice on May 4, 2022 regarding the 2022 Provincial Election Primer. The April 28, 2022 version of the primer mistakenly provided inaccurate indicators related to alcohol use in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties (HPEC). In the April 28 version, rates of emergency department visits were provided per 1,000 population. This rate is now accurately portrayed per 100,000 population. The version available at hpepublichealth.ca/advocacy has been corrected and replaces all previous versions.



THE ISSUES

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is vital to overall health. The pandemic has negatively affected the mental health of many Ontarians, especially young people. Mental health is significantly impacted by many social determinants of health such as employment and working conditions, income, and social supports.

Indicators

The rate of emergency room visits for mental health concerns in HPEC is higher than the provincial average at 27.2 (compared to 22.5 across Ontario) per 100,000 population.

The rate of hospitalizations for mental health concerns in HPEC is higher than the provincial average at 7.9 (compared to 7.5 across Ontario) per 100,000 population.

Self-reported diagnosis of mood disorders is higher in HPEC (11.3%) than the provincial average (9.2%).

Self-reported mental health concerns during pregnancy are higher in HPEC (36.9%) than the provincial average (20.2%).



THE ACTIONS

- Provide funding to expand access to mental health services, including services for problematic substance use, with a special focus on youth-friendly approaches.
- Support increased access to primary care providers, living wages and appropriate and affordable housing.
- Provide resources and funding to workplaces to apply psychological health and safety principles that promote the mental health and resilience of workers.

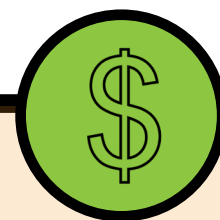
POVERTY

Stagnant wages and increasing cost of living make it difficult for people to meet their minimum needs. Single income households making minimum wage would have to work over 80 hours weekly to pay for an average two-bedroom rental unit. People living on social assistance do not have enough income for the current cost of living in HPEC.

Indicators

Fewer people in HPEC than the provincial average are participating in the labour force. There is 53.4% employment rate in HPEC compared to 59.8% in Ontario.

In HPEC, 15.9% of people are living on a low income (after-tax) compared to a 14.4% provincial average.



- Increase the minimum wage to be in alignment with a living wage (\$17.95 in HPEC) and index it to inflation.
- Increase social assistance (ODSP and OW) to be in alignment with a basic income to provide an adequate standard of living.
- Provide low cost childcare to support primary caregivers to get back into the workforce to increase household income.

OPIOIDS

Misuse of prescription and illicit opioids has devastating health and social effects on individuals, families and communities. Opioid-related mortality, hospitalizations and emergency room visits have been increasing over time across Ontario for several years, only growing worse during the pandemic.

Indicators

The rate of emergency room visits for opioid-related harms in HPEC is higher than the provincial average at 123.6 (compared to 84.6 across Ontario) per 100,000 population.

The rate of hospitalizations for opioid-related harms in HPEC is higher than the provincial average at 18.1 (compared to 13.7 across Ontario) per 100,000 population.

Opioid-related deaths saw a 79% increase across Ontario from February to December 2020.

Please note: Many opioid statistics are vastly underreported due to stigma experienced by people who use drugs and fear of negative consequences.



- Decriminalize simple possession charges for people who use drugs.
- Provide funding and resources for harm reduction strategies, such as supervised consumption sites and enhanced access to naloxone which can reverse opioid-related overdoses.
- Increase access to substance use treatment programs and services.

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is a leading, yet preventable, cause of death, disease, and disability in Ontario. Harms extend beyond the consumer to families, communities and the health care system. Although Ontario has been a leader in alcohol policy in the past, erosion of protective policies has and will continue to increase alcohol-related harms and costs across the province.

Indicators

In HPEC, 48.5% of residents drink alcohol at rates that put them at risk for acute injury and 18.7% drink enough alcohol to put themselves at risk for chronic illnesses.

The rate of emergency department visits for conditions entirely caused by alcohol in HPEC is higher than the provincial average at 555.6 (compared to 514.6 across Ontario) per 100,000 population.

The rate of alcohol-attributable hospitalizations for injury in HPEC is higher than the provincial average at 9.8 (compared to 7.5 across Ontario) per 1,000 population.

The rate of alcohol-attributable hospitalizations for chronic disease in HPEC is higher than the provincial average at 12.3 (compared to 9.4 across Ontario) per 1,000 population.



- Develop and implement a comprehensive provincial alcohol strategy independent from the alcohol industry that includes:
 - Policy measures proven to minimize health and social harms of alcohol consumption, such as pricing, physical and legal availability, and marketing.
 - Increased public education about the risks of alcohol consumption to create a more supportive environment for policies that reduce alcohol-related harms.
 - Improved monitoring and documentation of public health and safety outcomes to inform future policy development.