



Ontario's Social Landscape
Socio-demographic trends and conditions in communities across the province

Toronto – September 8, 2010

As a result of an aging population, unstable employment opportunities, fluctuating populations, and an influx of diversity and multiculturalism, the socio-economic landscape of Ontario is undergoing significant transformations. Some of these changes are common across Ontario and some are specific to certain communities, however, as a whole they are generating additional demands on the limited resources of government and community organizations.

To summarize the effects of these changes this document will briefly discuss the five key themes outlined in *Ontario's Social Landscape: Socio-demographic trends and conditions in communities across the province*, a document compiled by the Social Planning Network of Ontario and its member organizations. The themes presented are diversity, aging population, economy and recession, housing and electoral participation.

Cartograms were utilized within the report to both describe and analyze the geographic distribution pattern of various socio-demographic characteristics. This form of GIS mapping was intentionally used because it provides a unique way to visualize the geographic distribution pattern of a specific land area, such as a province or municipality. The cartogram resizes an area and approximates the value of a variable of interest such as senior population, or election results.

Diversity

Simply put, Ontario is a richly diverse and growing province (over a period of 10 years the population increased by 13%). The composition of Ontario's population is particularly dynamic because of increased rates of immigration, its Francophone and Aboriginal populations, and the different physical abilities and mental health conditions of its residents. Therefore, equitable access to programs and services are extremely important. Understanding Ontario's diverse social landscape is critical to shaping public policy, social services and community programs so that they meet everyone's needs.

Aging Population

There is a need for more dialogue and planning so that programs and institutions in Ontario meet the societal needs associated with its aging populations. The aging of Ontario's population raises important questions for policy-makers and service providers, these include:

- Will the supports be available to facilitate seniors aging in place?
- How do we address pension issues to ensure that every senior enjoys a decent quality of life in their retirement?
- What are the implications of the aging trend on the labour force?

Economy & Recession

Ontario has been the hardest hit of all Canadian provinces, excepting Newfoundland and Labrador, by the 2008 economic recession. Between 2007 and 2009 the province experienced a 5.0% drop in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and lost over 200,000 jobs. Declining global economic conditions in the province have resulted in nearly a 50% drop in corporate profit, lowered business investments, rising unemployment and lower incomes.

Consider the long term social impacts that recession may bring to Ontario communities:

- Loss of employment relates to the onset of many health concerns including depression, less healthy lifestyles, heart disease and overburdened health care services
- Job loss places increased financial pressures on individuals and families - increased debt-loads and depletion of assets and/or savings
- Chronic psychological stress caused by unemployment may result in family conflict, arguing, substance abuse, and even domestic violence may manifest as a result.
- Social cohesion can decrease in communities as individuals withdraw and struggle in isolation – evidenced by neighbourhood degradation, business closures, and increase in rates of crime

Housing

Ontario has considerable housing affordability problems. Lack of affordability in housing undermines health and well-being, and jeopardizes the quality of life of Ontarians. The poor condition of band housing on Native reserves in Ontario and across Canada requires sustained and concerted action by senior levels of government.

The Ontario government's commitment to develop a long-term affordable housing strategy for the province is much welcome and long overdue. However, it remains to be seen whether needed investments will follow provincial promises. All federal parties, with the exception of the Conservative party, have committed to a federal poverty reduction strategy, including action on housing. Commitment at the federal level is critical to moving forward on the human right to safe, decent and affordable housing in Ontario and across Canada.

Electoral Participation in Ontario

Recent elections have shown a steady decline in voter turnout across all levels of elected office in Canada. After the 2000 federal election, Elections Canada commissioned a survey of over 5,000 persons to deepen their understanding of non-voters. This study showed that household income was a statistically significant predictor of voter turnout in the 1993, 1997 and 2000 Federal Elections. While age was found to be the demographic factor that influences voter behaviour by far, income was the second most important one, and was found to have a greater impact than education, immigration status, or years of residence in one's neighbourhood.

The following sources offer additional data and analysis on key themes that should be addressed to ensure that the future of Ontario's social landscape supports everyone.

- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation – www.cmhc.ca
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – www.policyalternatives.ca
- Canadian Council on Social Development – www.ccsd.ca
- Community Social Data Strategy – www.cscs-sacass.ca
- Elections Ontario – www.elections.on.ca
- Homeless Hub – www.homelesshub.ca
- Ontario Human Rights Commission – www.ohrc.on.ca
- Statistics Canada – www.statcan.gc.ca

Project funded by:

