

HEALTH EQUITY PLAN

2025 - 2028

niagarahealth

PURPOSE, VISION & VALUES

OUR PURPOSE:

Extraordinary Caring.
Every Person. Every Time.

OUR VISION:

A Healthier Niagara

Our Values inspire us to be

EXTRAORDINARY

by guiding our decision
making and behaviour.



Compassion in Action

Our compassionate and respectful culture is one in which we quickly take action to meet the needs of those we serve and to make healthcare better. We treat each other well.



Driven by Optimism

We are hopeful and optimistic in tackling our challenges. In partnership we accomplish more. We are resilient through change and drive innovation.



Achieving Ambitious Results

We hold ourselves to the highest standards. We are accountable for high-performing, high-quality, sustainable and innovative healthcare. We are transparent about performance and commit to improve.

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HEALTH EQUITY

Health equity means all people can reach their full health potential without disadvantage due to social position or circumstances.

As defined by Health Quality Ontario, this requires fair and appropriate care that meets individual needs, regardless of location, circumstances or identity.

As a regional hospital system, Niagara Health recognizes its responsibility to provide equitable, high-quality care for all. This inaugural Health Equity Plan – an addendum to the Niagara Health 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, **Transforming Care** and a complement to the **Indigenous Health Services and Reconciliation Plan** – reinforces our commitment to embedding equity across the organization to improve health outcomes for the diverse communities we serve.

Through evidence-based initiatives, strong community partnerships, and system-wide improvements, we aim to identify and address disparities while fostering a responsive and inclusive hospital environment. This plan affirms the fundamental importance of equitable healthcare and outlines a three-year roadmap to achieving measurable, lasting impact.

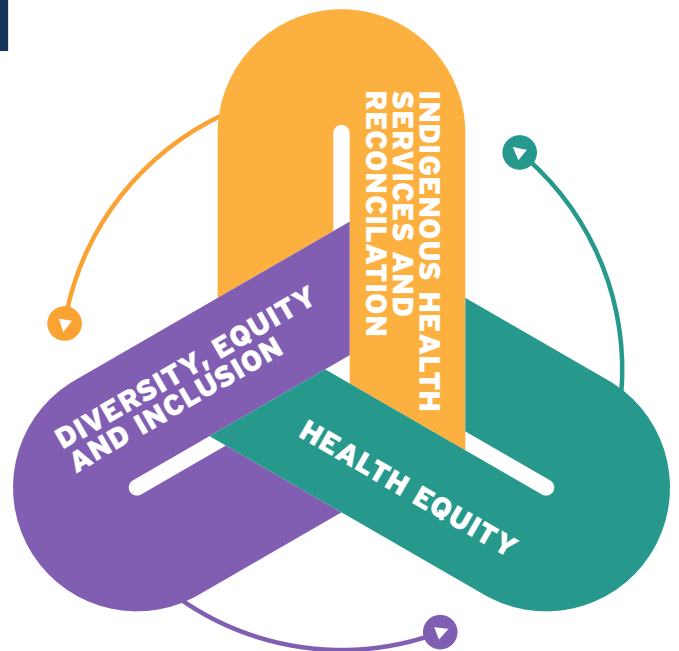




Niagara Health's commitment to equity began with its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Action Plan in 2021, establishing foundational practices for a respectful and inclusive environment to strengthen the workforce and organizational culture. These efforts were guided through an organizational DEI Committee that supports various educational opportunities, which includes mandatory training for all physicians and staff. These fundamentals ensure our teams reflect and understand the communities we serve and have been fundamental to building a health system rooted in respect and support.

Through collaboration with Indigenous leaders, organizations and communities across Niagara, we developed Journey to Reconciliation: Indigenous Health Services and Reconciliation Plan to guide Niagara Health's commitment to culturally safe care. Our dedicated team of Indigenous staff promotes and implements practices that support inclusive, equitable and compassionate healthcare journeys for Indigenous patients and their families.

OUR JOURNEY TO HEALTH EQUITY



As Niagara Health continues to grow and learn, the Health Equity Plan marks an important step forward in our commitment to ensuring every individual in Niagara has the opportunity to reach their full health potential. With a growing and increasingly diverse population, it is essential that hospital care adapts to meet the changing needs of the communities we serve.

GUIDING OUR WORK

The Health Equity Plan was developed based on four guiding principles that ensure an evidence-informed, Niagara-specific approach aligned with the hospital's mandate. These principles underscore our commitment to advancing health equity by addressing the unique needs of our local population while fostering collaboration.

LOCAL

Our focus centres on addressing the distinct needs of the Niagara region through a deep understanding of our population's health challenges and experiences. By leveraging local data, we ensure our initiatives are tailored, relevant and responsive to the communities we serve. This approach enables us to develop solutions that reflect the real needs of the population.

EVIDENCE-INFORMED

Our commitment to evidence-informed care ensures that every action, intervention and program is grounded in the latest research, and best practices. By prioritizing evidence-based approaches, the plan focuses on implementing strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness, alongside ongoing evaluation to refine and respond to evolving health needs.

WITHIN HOSPITAL SCOPE

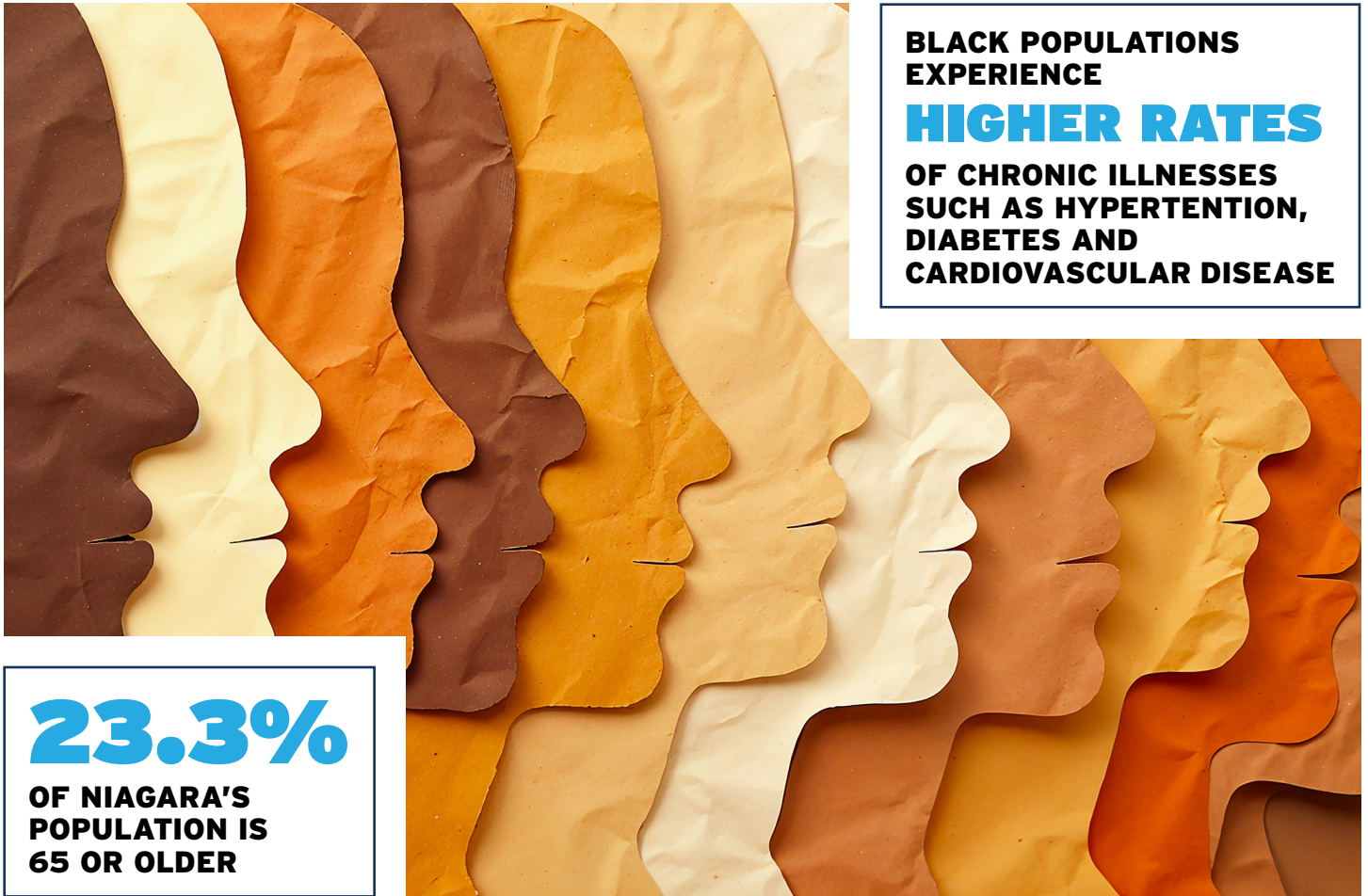
While our plan emphasizes initiatives that can be directly implemented within the hospital setting, we recognize health equity extends beyond clinical environments, requiring strong partnerships across the broader healthcare and social service systems. This principle ensures we leverage our expertise and resources to enhance clinical practices while working alongside community partners to drive sustainable, system-wide change.

CONNECTED

We recognize meaningful engagement with our community is essential to ensuring this work is attuned to the lived experiences of those we serve. Our approach also builds on the strengths of our partners and prioritizes collaboration to ensure solutions leverage expertise outside the walls of the hospital and that our outcomes are sustainable.



OUR PRIORITY POPULATIONS



BLACK POPULATIONS EXPERIENCE HIGHER RATES OF CHRONIC ILLNESSES SUCH AS HYPERTENSION, DIABETES AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE

23.3%

OF NIAGARA'S POPULATION IS 65 OR OLDER

In alignment with Ontario Health's Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, and Anti-Racism Framework, Niagara Health has identified priority populations to ensure targeted and meaningful equity efforts.

While Indigenous populations are the focus of the inaugural *Indigenous Health Services and Reconciliation Plan*, this Health Equity Plan focuses on two groups with growing needs in the Niagara region; older adults and individuals experiencing homelessness, alongside Black populations.

The emphasis on older adults reflects our region's unique demographics. With 3.2% of residents aged 85 and older, Niagara has the third-highest percentage of this age group in Canada. Additionally, 23.3% of Niagara's population is 65 or older, compared to the provincial average of 18.5%. Over the next 25 years, the number of older adults in the region is projected to increase by 50-70%, with seniors accounting for 60% of Niagara's population growth between 2011 and 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2021). This demographic shift has significant implications for healthcare, as Niagara residents already experience higher rates of chronic conditions—including arthritis, asthma, diabetes, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease –

compared to the provincial average. These complex health needs not only impact patient outcomes but also place increasing demands on the healthcare system's resources and capacity.

Homelessness further complicates healthcare access and outcomes. In Niagara, homelessness remains a growing challenge. As of December 31, 2023, 594 individuals were identified as chronically homeless, up from 472 in the previous reporting period (Niagara Region, 2024). Preliminary data suggest that more individuals are experiencing homelessness foreextended periods, highlighting a rising trend in chronic homelessness.

Read Niagara Health's inaugural Indigenous Health Services and Reconciliation Plan at NiagaraHealth.on.ca/IHSR



PRIORITY POPULATIONS

OLDER ADULT POPULATION

In Ontario, individuals experiencing homelessness face mortality rates up to four times higher than the general population and often rely on emergency services for conditions better managed through primary care.

Between 2021 and 2024, Niagara Health saw a 60.3% increase in Emergency Department (ED) visits from individuals experiencing homelessness. This trend underscores the urgent need for expanded access to primary care and supportive healthcare services across the region.

Our commitment to health equity also extends to Niagara's Black community, aligning with provincial priorities outlined in Ontario Health's Equity, Inclusion, Diversity, and

INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

60.3%

INCREASE IN ED VISITS FROM INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS BETWEEN 2021 & 2024

Anti-Racism Framework and the Ontario Health Black Health Plan. These frameworks, supported by clinical data, reveal significant health disparities. Across Canada, Black populations experience higher rates of chronic illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, often exacerbated by systemic barriers to

BLACK POPULATION

culturally responsive care. In Ontario, data show disproportionate mental health challenges, delayed diagnoses, and lower rates of preventive screenings, all contributing to poorer health outcomes (Olanlesi-Aliu, Alaazi, & Salami, 2023).

Recognizing that health equity is an evolving journey, our plan remains flexible to integrate emerging evidence and community insights. While some initiatives will yield immediate improvements, others require sustained effort to embed equity across our culture, services, and systems. Our goal is to drive measurable improvements in health outcomes for all communities we serve while fostering a healthcare system rooted in respect, cultural safety, and inclusion.

OUR PLAN FOR HEALTH EQUITY



Enhance Care for Priority Populations



Mobilize Regional Partners for Collective Impact



Meet the Needs of Our Community



Lay Foundation for a Sustainable Approach to Health Equity



PEOPLE FIRST

Meet the Needs of Our Community

Build a foundation of data to understand disparities affecting Niagara's diverse population to inform the hospital's work.



SAFE & QUALITY CARE

Enhance Care for Priority Populations

Design and implement targeted interventions that promote equity in care and support better access and outcomes for underserved communities.



HOW WE WORK

Mobilize Partnerships for Collective Impact

Create a network of community resources to support a whole person approach for priority populations through coordination and strong partnerships.

CREATE A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

Lay Foundation for a Sustainable Approach to Health Equity

Build capacity for health equity through continuous education, evidence-based practice, and integrated quality improvement (QI) processes.

PEOPLE FIRST

Meeting the Needs of Our Community

Purpose:

Leverage data to understand disparities affecting Niagara's diverse population to inform the hospital's work.

Key Actions:

- Develop and implement Niagara Health's sociodemographic data collection plan through the Hospital Information System
- Build capacity for data analytics
- Identify opportunities for clinical improvement within the hospital system

HOW WE WORK

Mobilize Partnerships for Collective Impact

Purpose:

Create a network of community resources to support a whole person approach for priority populations through coordination and strong partnerships.

Key Actions:

- Identify and map local community services and supports
- Forge purposeful and formal partnerships with community organizations to ensure seamless support across systems
- Develop clear referral pathways to connect patients to necessary services within and outside of the hospital

SAFE AND QUALITY CARE

Enhance Care for Priority Populations

Purpose:

Design and implement targeted interventions that promote equity and improve outcomes for underserved communities.

Key Actions:

- Introduce preventative health education and targeted campaigns to reduce risk factors and improve long-term health outcomes
- Explore social medicine by connecting seniors and patients in the ED with non-medical needs to community supports and programming
- Introduce clinical programs tailored to improve health outcomes for specific populations related to sickle cell, limb amputations and sepsis

POSITIONING OURSELVES FOR SUCCESS

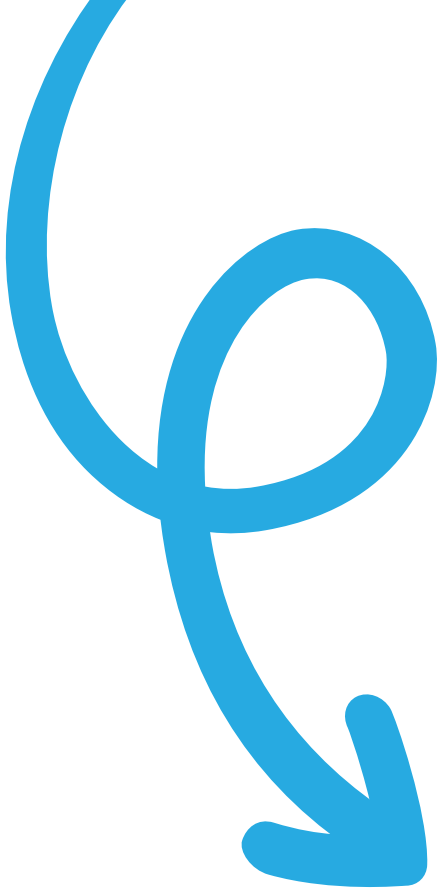
Create a Sustainable Approach to Improve Health Outcomes

Purpose:

Build capacity for health equity through continuous education, evidence-based practice and integrated quality improvement (QI) processes.

Key Actions:

- Support continuous learning on health equity for our internal team and external partners
- Embed health equity principles into metrics of success and quality improvement plans
- Identify research initiatives to support best practices and drive evidence-based improvements in equitable care



DRIVING MEANINGFUL CHANGE THROUGH MEASURABLE ACTION

The initiatives outlined in the Health Equity Plan mark the beginning of a meaningful, sustainable and lasting transformation.

By implementing these strategic priorities, we aspire to lead the way in delivering equitable care that meets the unique needs of our community and enhances health outcomes.

To move this work forward, we will actively engage patients and partners in identifying actionable initiatives for Niagara Health, ensuring our efforts are informed by those we serve. We will measure and report our progress, leveraging data collection, validation, and analysis to assess our impact and identify opportunities for improvement. By tracking health outcomes and patient experience surveys, we will evaluate how effectively we are addressing the needs of priority populations. Additionally, we will strengthen our collaborative partnerships to monitor the collective impact of our shared efforts.

As part of our ongoing commitment to improving care at Niagara Health, we will set clear targets for education and training, embedding health equity into key programs. This approach underscores our dedication to measurable improvements in patient care and our mission to achieve better health outcomes for all members of our community. We acknowledge that this work requires sustained effort and continuous learning, and we remain committed to making steady progress toward our goals.





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