



**Canadian Mental  
Health Association**  
Waterloo Wellington  
*Mental health for all*



# How Mentally Healthy is Your Community Survey

SUMMER 2023

---

## Introduction

Below is a summary of findings from a survey of residents of Ontario's Waterloo and Wellington Regions on the topic of mental health and well-being. The survey was conducted between August 9 and 18, 2023, using an online methodology. In total, N=530 residents participated in the 10-minute survey. Results have been weighted using Census Canada 2021 data to reflect the demographic realities of the Regions. While online research employs samples of convenience, an equivalent telephone sample of this size is considered accurate to within +/- 4.2%, nineteen times out of twenty.



## Survey Highlights

- Seven-in-ten residents of the Waterloo and Wellington Regions have accessed mental health services and supports at some point for themselves or for someone in their immediate family.
- Ability to access mental health supports within a city or community is an important factor contributing to a residents' mental health – but it is not quite as important as safety from violence and physical harm or having a reasonable commute to and from work.
- Among the ways in which a community can contribute to citizens' mental well-being, residents of Wellington and Waterloo Regions prioritize ensuring food security, affordable housing, personal safety and public use of green space ahead of access to mental health services.
- While residents of Waterloo and Wellington Regions are likely to recommend their respective municipalities as good places to live, they are less likely to describe these communities as mentally healthy cities.
- Despite reported access to mental health services and stated importance of accessibility to these, awareness of the CMHA WW is limited to just under half of all residents across the Region; awareness is highest in the City of Guelph (65% of residents). Regardless, residents attribute great importance to the mandate of the CMHA WW within their Region (92% say it is important).

## Survey Results

Of the N=530 survey respondents, almost three-quarters (73%) describe their state of mental health as “good” (including excellent, very good and good), while the balance (27%) describe their mental health as either fair or poor. This result is consistent across both geographic Regions.

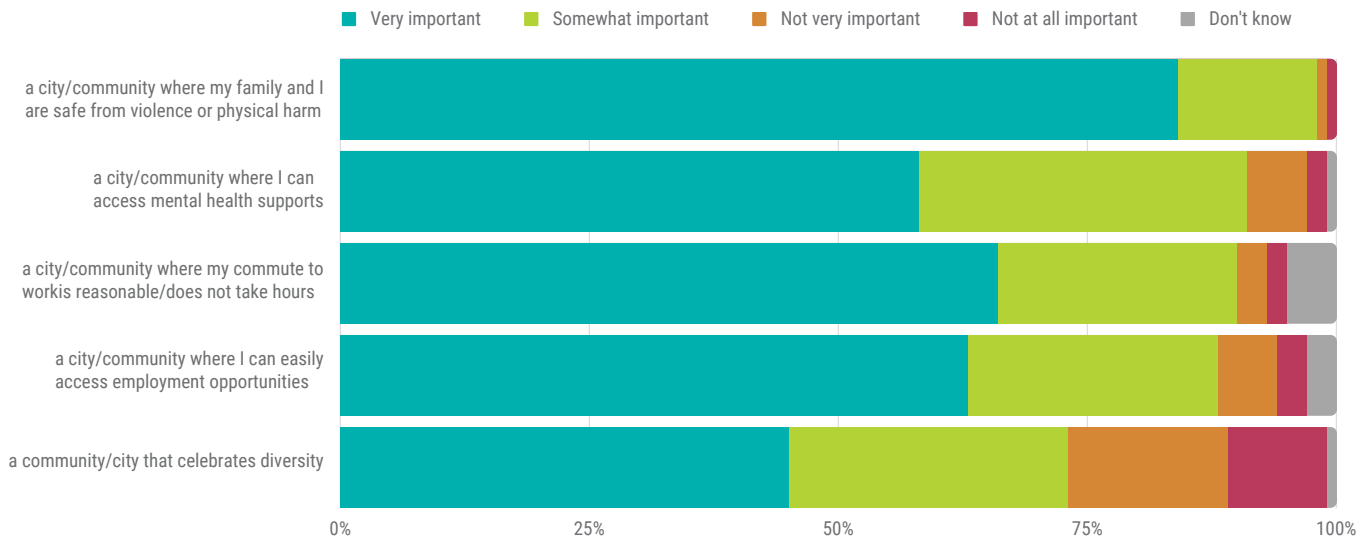
Just over seven-in-ten (71%) residents report that they have accessed mental health services and supports, either for themselves or on behalf of an immediate family member. One-quarter (27%) report not having needed these services. Reported accessing of mental health services and supports is highest among those identifying as Indigenous/Aboriginal (90%), LGBTQ+ (90%) and lowest among those identifying as a person of colour/visible minority (41% who say “no”) and those over the age of 75 (53% saying “no”).

### **What makes a “Mentally Healthy” Community?**

Residents of the Waterloo and Wellington Regions prioritize knowing they are safe from violence and physical harm as contributing to their overall mental health (97% say this knowledge is “important” to their mental health). Of marginally less importance is living in a community/city where I know I can access mental health supports (90% important) and living in a city/community where my commute is reasonable/does not take hours (87%). It is noteworthy that the proportions of respondents identifying each of these as very important contributions to their mental health vary significantly, with higher proportions identifying personal safety as of greater importance than mental health supports (83% and 57% respectively).



## Important to Your Mental Health



Perhaps not surprisingly, those who have accessed mental health supports in the past (for themselves or for a member of their immediate family) attribute greater importance to the availability of these resources (94%) than do those who have never needed these services.

Ability to access employment opportunities (84%) and living in a Community that celebrates and encourages diversity (72%) also make important contributions to overall mental health, but to lesser degrees than perceptions of personal safety, reduced commuting times and access to mental health resources and services.

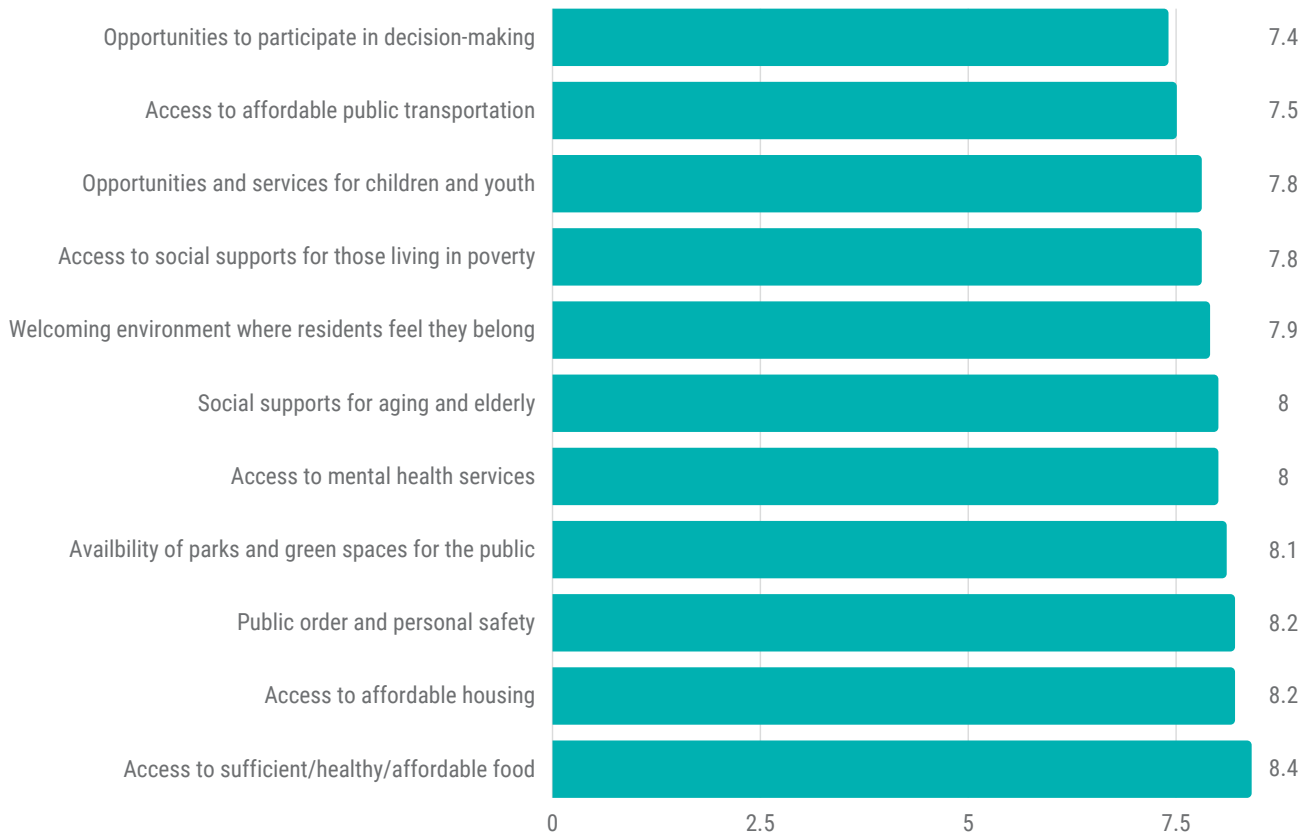
Residents were presented with the idea that there are many ways in which cities can contribute to the mental health and well-being of its residents. Among Community services that make the most significant contribution to residents' mental well-being are food security (8.4 on a 10pt scale), access to affordable housing (8.2) and personal safety from crime and violence (8.2).

Access to mental health services is marginally less significant (8.0), on par with availability of social supports for aging and the elderly. Services residents of the Regions feel make the least significant contributions to mental health include access to affordable public transportation (7.5) and opportunities to participate in civic decision-making (including voting and community engagement at 7.4/10).

Women consider access to mental health services to be a more significant contribution by cities in stewarding mental health than do men (8.2 and 7.7, respectively), while residents over the age of 75 attribute the least significance to these services (6.1). Residents who have, themselves, accessed mental health services in the past accord greater significance to these services (8.1) than do those who have not needed them (7.3).



## Community Contributions to Mental Health (Overall significance out of 10)



## Evaluations of Mental Health of Cities

Using a ten-point scale, residents of the Regions of Waterloo and Wellington offer different assessments of the desirability of their communities. On average, residents of Waterloo Region rate their area of residence at 7.2 out of 10 in terms of likelihood to recommend it to a friend or family member as a place to live. Within the Region, scores are higher among those living outside of one of the larger municipalities (8.1) and those living in the City of Waterloo (7.5 – compared to only 6.9 in Kitchener and 6.8 in Cambridge).

By comparison, residents of Wellington Region offer 7.3/10 overall, with scores higher in Guelph (7.5) than in the other more rural areas of the Region (6.4).



Municipality	Rating out of 10
City of Waterloo	6.8
City of Guelph	6.7
Waterloo Region (outside Tri-city area)	6.3
City of Kitchener	5.9
City of Cambridge	5.8
Wellington County (outside Guelph)	5.0

When it comes to considering the same municipalities as mentally healthy communities, evaluations are somewhat more muted. Lower-tier municipalities of Waterloo (6.8) and Guelph (6.7) enjoy the highest ratings from residents while Kitchener (5.9), Cambridge (5.8) and Wellington County (outside of Guelph – 5.0) report the most critical evaluations of the mental health of their municipalities.

Despite these evaluations, residents suggest it is important to them that their local governments prioritize support for the mental health and well-being of residents (92% overall report it to be important). Members of the LGBTQ+ community (63%), residents with disabilities (63%) and residents who have previously accessed mental health services (53%) are the groups most likely to report that it is very important for local governments to prioritize mental health supports.

On an open-ended basis, residents report that their municipalities support their mental health by ensuring social supports and services are available (36%), by providing outdoor activities and facilities for use (18%) and by making accessible general and mental health care supports (15% and 12% respectively). Providing affordable housing is also a way in which residents see their municipalities as supporting mental health and wellness (12%).



***“The Grove for children and youth supports; Here 247; Free emergency counselling for adults [thru] Trellis.”***

***“Many free accessible trails...”***

***“Good access to green space, many support organizations, focus on safety and working on homelessness.”***

When contemplating ways in which cities can do a better job of supporting resident mental health, focus on affordable housing and living is the top priority for residents (30%), followed by access to more health care services in the area (20%). Residents would also like to see an increase in funding for mental health services and supports (13%), as well as an increase in the number of health care practitioners (general and mental health focused) in the area (11%).

***“...There are no mental health supports in my community. Bring. Some. In.”***

***“Better access to supports, more housing, better and more frequent transit.”***

***“Make more affordable housing for the people that are working. Not low income but affordable for those working regular jobs.”***