Huron County Rural Lens

A tool to promote rural equity and inclusion
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Parts of this document were adapted in part from work done by the City of Ottawa\(^1\) and by the Department of Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in the United Kingdom.\(^2\) As such, we would also like to acknowledge these sources and direct readers to these resources should they seek additional information.


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Section 1 –
Huron County Rural Lens: PURPOSE & OVERVIEW
What is a LENS?

A lens is like a pair of glasses – it is designed to help you see things more clearly, or in a new way.

The process of using a lens involves considering the implications of an initiative on a given population, and helps to identify unforeseen consequences or opportunities.

Ultimately, the intention of a lens is to lead a user to ‘see the world through someone else’s eyes’ so they can anticipate and evaluate potential outcomes from a different perspective, as well as begin to look for solutions.

Using a lens will allow you to be more effective in your daily work by having a clearer focus and a more complete view of important issues.

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Why is a RURAL lens needed?

Rural areas are unique – from urban areas certainly, but also from each other. As a result, they often have their own distinct characteristics and face their own diverse challenges.

Using a ‘rural lens’ refers to the process of thoroughly considering rural issues and perspectives whenever new initiatives are being developed or adapted.\(^3\) This consideration helps to ensure that such initiatives will not cause unintended negative consequences when they are employed in rural communities.

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\(^3\) Tousaw, Leeming and Reid, 2011
If a rural lens is not used, such unintended consequences may arise in various ways:

- Rural needs and priorities may differ from those of urban communities and may often be more critical (e.g. transport).
- Solutions for rural areas might differ from the solutions that work in urban areas.
- Strategies, policies or programs may result in adverse consequences for rural communities, particularly if they are primarily designed with urban communities in mind.

Rural issues have recently been thrust into the spotlight due to negative changes and declines in many rural communities across the province. The root causes of these issues are complex and the result of interconnected, big-picture factors such as societal change (e.g. demographics), global economic trends and increasing environmental pressures.

This lens will focus on describing this interplay of factors as they currently exist in the context of Huron County, and what needs to be considered when designing programs, policies, and services for the community.

**Purpose of this Lens**

The purpose of this lens is to help municipal staff and local decision makers ensure that the policies, programs, and services they create do not adversely affect the well-being of the Huron County community. This lens will also benefit decision makers and staff at a provincial and federal level.

This lens has been designed around the unique characteristics of Huron County to ensure that a broad range of implications is considered throughout the development of initiatives on any topic and from any municipal department.

There are many positive aspects of living and working in Huron. The lens, however, brings attention to some challenges faced by various groups living within the county. Acknowledging these challenges can help when developing programs and adapting to provincial legislation so that all members of the community are considered.
Specifically, the lens may be used when:

- Developing new policies, programs and services
- Adapting existing policies, programs and services designed elsewhere (e.g. other communities, levels of government)
- Evaluating existing policies, programs and services to assess whether they could work better in the community

Using a lens is intended to help someone see the impact(s) of their actions from another’s perspective. In this case, the *Huron County Rural Lens* will be an interactive tool designed to lead users through the process of considering the implications of policies, programs, and services on rural areas, and on Huron County in particular.

As such, using this Lens will help to:

- Minimize unintended negative consequences by anticipating impacts before they occur,
- Maximize positive outcomes and generate better solutions by incorporating a diversity of rural perspectives,
- Take positive steps toward removing barriers that impact vulnerable Huron County residents,
- Promote equity and inclusion.

**Audience of the Lens**

The *Huron County Rural Lens* may be used by anyone who wishes to gain a greater perspective of rural issues and a deeper understanding of particular challenges faced by specific groups in Huron County.

The primary audience includes, but is not limited to:

- Councillors and their staff,
- Huron County staff and management,
- Provincial and federal politicians and staff,
- Community partners, consultants and businesses providing services in conjunction with or on behalf of the County,
- External bodies or community agencies that choose to use the Lens,
- Those applying for grants or seeking partnerships,
- NGOs.

As a secondary audience, the lens may also be appropriate for use by municipal staff from other rural jurisdictions with similar characteristics to Huron County.
Sustainable Huron Framework

Underpinning much of the material and content of this Lens is the Sustainability Framework contained in Sustainable Huron’s Community Sustainability Plan (Figure 1).

This framework considers the three pillars of environment, economy, and society/culture and the necessary overlap between each area in order to achieve community sustainability.

Previous work by Sustainable Huron\(^4\) has identified a variety of priorities and challenges in each of these three areas that represent an excellent foundation for the issues explored in this Lens.

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\[^4\] Sustainable Huron, 2011. Community Sustainability Plan

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As you work through the Huron County Rural Lens, we invite you to keep these challenges and priorities in mind as these are important issues of consideration when evaluating any initiative in the context of Huron County, and are embedded throughout the Lens material.

Sustainable Huron’s Goals and Strategies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENVIRONMENTAL INTEGRITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRIORITIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ecosystem restoration and protection – including tree planting on unfarmed land and along creeks and rivers</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Strategies for addressing climate change issues</td>
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<td>- Energy efficiency and conservation</td>
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<td>- Landscaping that decreases lawn acreage</td>
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<td>- Community power generation (solar, etc.)</td>
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<td>- Liveable communities</td>
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\[
\text{Figure 1 – Sustainable Huron Framework}
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### Community and Social Well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIORITIES</th>
<th>CHALLENGES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- A welcoming community to new residents and visitors</td>
<td>- Rural isolation and accessible/affordable transportation</td>
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<td>- Community pride and ownership</td>
<td>- Out-migration of youth searching for better opportunities</td>
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<td>- Funding for the arts</td>
<td>- Access to health and wellness services and programs</td>
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<td>- Developing the next generation of community leaders</td>
<td>- An aging population</td>
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<td>- Compact communities that are walk-able</td>
<td>- Insufficient affordable housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Connections to service providers outside Huron County</td>
<td>- Cost of maintaining and upgrading infrastructure</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Enhanced mental health resources and public awareness</td>
<td>- Poverty and food security</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Addressing homelessness and affordable housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Walking and biking trails and active transportation</td>
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### Economic Security

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<th>PRIORITIES</th>
<th>CHALLENGES</th>
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<td>- Agri-food and agri-business</td>
<td>- Retaining businesses in downtowns</td>
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<td>- Manufacturing and industry</td>
<td>- Declining workforce and associated “brain-drain”</td>
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<td>- Retail and service</td>
<td>- Succession planning for an aging farming population</td>
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<td>- Tourism and hospitality</td>
<td>- Regional systems to ensure access to local foods</td>
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<td>- Culture and the creative economy</td>
<td>- Balancing green energy generation with community goals</td>
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<td>- Attracting more families</td>
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<td>- Retaining and attracting youth to Huron County employment opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>especially healthcare, agriculture, small business entrepreneurism, and</td>
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<tr>
<td>manufacturing</td>
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<td>- Infrastructure (broadband)</td>
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Structure of the Lens

The *Huron County Rural Lens* consists of this User’s Guide and Lens ‘Tool’, comprising 4 sections:

1) Introduction and Overview of the Lens
2) Considerations for Huron: Landscape and Geography
3) Considerations for Huron: People and Culture
4) Rural Lens Worksheet

In the first section, we have introduced the Lens, given its purpose, and described how to use it.

In the second section, we will discuss some of the important features of the rural landscape and geography of Huron County, and the implications for policies, programs and services.

In the third section, we will describe the people of Huron, with a focus on populations that may be more vulnerable in rural areas. Barriers, challenges and inequities will be discussed for each group with an underlying emphasis on the culture and values of people in the local community.

In the fourth section, we provide an interactive worksheet that can be used to work through the process of creating, adapting, or evaluating a new community initiative.
Section 2 –
Considerations for Huron:
LANDSCAPE & GEOGRAPHY
DISTANCE AND POPULATION DENSITY

Overall, Huron County shares many similarities with other rural areas in southwestern Ontario. In particular, the county encompasses a large geography with a dispersed population across many towns, villages and hamlets (Figure 2). In 2011, the county had a total population of 59,100 and an area of 3,399.63 km$^2$ resulting in a population density of 17.4 persons per square km.\(^5\)

SERVICE DELIVERY

This relatively low population density can be a challenge for delivering services equitably across the county. For example, it may mean that satellite locations need to be created in order to reach residents on the edges of the county or those far from population centres. Low population density may also result in an additional cost to the delivery of services, which needs to be considered upfront in the design of initiatives. At the same time, considering its geographic size and small population, Huron County may have more limited resources for the delivery of initiatives. Taken together, the increased cost of delivery and the limited availability of resources means that initiatives must be designed as efficiently as possible and incorporate innovative delivery ideas wherever appropriate.

\(^{5}\) Statistics Canada, 2011 Census of Population.
These long distances also mean that for many rural residents, active transportation (i.e. walking or cycling) is not a realistic option. While access to a vehicle may not be an issue for most people in the county, it does present an obstacle for certain residents such as seniors, youth, those with low-income, and those with physical or mental disabilities. These groups may then be unable to access services on their own, or transportation may need to be provided which then adds an additional cost to the delivery of initiatives.

ALTERNATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

One way to overcome issues with distance and transportation is through the use of alternative service delivery, such as online. While this may not be appropriate for every initiative, it is an option worth considering as it may reduce costs as well as reach a large audience for consultations. However, it is important to consider that high-speed internet access is not uniform across the county and that not everyone may be equally comfortable with online services. Therefore, options for accessibility and the characteristics of the audience must both be considered before an initiative is designed to rely exclusively on internet access.

IMPORTANCE OF LOCATION

Finally, like any other rural community, population density varies across Huron County. While some residents reside in towns where many services will be close by, others live scattered throughout the countryside far from a settlement area. This means that accessibility will vary across the county and that the full ‘spectrum of rurality’ needs to be considered in the design of initiatives. For example, the way a service is delivered in Goderich may not be the same as how it is delivered in Blyth, as the obstacles faced by each set of residents may be distinct and different.
DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE COUNTY

Because Huron County covers such a large area, there are also differences within the county moving from south to north. This is largely attributed to the fact that the urban centre of London, Ontario, is located less than 40 km from the southern boundary of the county. This provides people living in the south with easier access to employment, training, and health care opportunities as well as a larger variety of services.6

In particular, people living in the north of the county have few transportation options other than private vehicles. Bus service that was available between communities has been reduced and in some cases, eliminated, over the years. For example, there is one bus line operating in Huron County that runs from Owen Sound to London three days per week. With only one run per day, it can be challenging to take the bus and return home on the same day.

There are taxis within the county, but again, the distances make them an expensive option. There is also an EasyRide service that provides flexible transportation for seniors and people with disabilities that is shared between Huron and Perth Counties.

While there are shopping opportunities in some of Huron’s larger communities, the options are often limited. As a result, families often travel to Waterloo or London to buy shoes, clothes and other necessities for their families.

Distance - Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- How will your initiative be accessible to residents living in all parts of the county?
- Have you accounted for the increased cost of delivering services to a dispersed population?
- Are there opportunities to partner with existing service providers to deliver your initiative?
- Can portions, or all, of your initiative use alternative service delivery methods, such as online (where appropriate)?
- Will residents require transportation to access your initiative? What about those in the county who lack transportation access?

6 Marr, 2012.
The economy of Huron County is founded on agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and creative industries. These sectors also provide the basis for strong service, trade, and retail businesses throughout the county. Within Huron County, small businesses are prevalent and about one in five workers is self-employed.

A ‘WORKING LANDSCAPE’

The economy of Huron County has been described as being based on a ‘working landscape,’ a reality that has major implications for both the economy and culture of the area.

In particular, many residents of the county make their income directly from the rural landscape. In fact, Huron County is Ontario’s most agriculturally productive county, with more census farms (3,260), more acres of farmland (711,525) and more gross farm receipts than any other county or district in the province.

Whether it is agriculture or tourism, the people of Huron create value through the use of the land and the natural environment. This means that the landscape must be protected in order to ensure that economic benefits can continue to be reaped in future generations. These efforts may include the continued protection of natural spaces, soil conservation, protection of water quality, or the preservation of prime agricultural lands.

The ‘working landscape’ sectors also bring special considerations for the economy and employment within Huron County. In particular, agriculture and tourism are subject to seasonality with exceptionally busy periods in the spring, summer and fall, and then more downtime in the winter. In terms of tourism, the large influx of seasonal residents and tourists in the summer also has implications for infrastructure and employment. As well, the availability of farmers and seasonal residents, who may be either exceptionally busy or absent for parts of the year, has important implications for the design of initiatives and public consultation exercises.

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7 Take Action for Sustainable Huron: Appendix 3, Current Conditions Report, 2011

8 http://www.huroncounty.ca/econdev/agriculture.php
Furthermore, because much of the physical environment is actually a farmer’s workplace, there is also sometimes an uneasy relationship between farmers and tourists, who love to come to Huron County because of the unique and beautiful natural environment.

Large farm equipment can slow down traffic on the roads and non-farmers often consider normal farming practices to be noisy, smelly, and dusty. Farmers sometimes feel threatened by non-farmers who may not understand modern farming practices. However, both groups need each other. Farmers need consumers to buy their products, and consumers need farmers to produce them. Both groups would benefit from a better understanding of each other.

The Huron landscape is an important tourist attraction. The lake, the fields, the farms, the small towns and villages make important contributions to the economy and overall well being.

SEASONAL POPULATION

In terms of tourism, Huron County is bordered on the west side by Lake Huron, and has over 100 km of shoreline. Unsurprisingly, this results in huge seasonal population fluctuations as people flock to the lakeside cottage communities in the summer. It is important to consider that this increases the demand for many

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9 Sustainable Huron, 2011
services including health care, emergency services, and retail during the summer months. While this provides economic opportunities, it can also result in challenges.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Huron County also contains numerous economic organizations that may act as information sources or partners in the creation of new initiatives. These organizations represent general economic development, such as the Huron Business Development Corporation, the Huron Small Business Enterprise Centre, the Chambers of Commerce, and the Business Improvement Associations (BIAs) as well as specialized organizations such as the Huron Manufacturing Association (HMA) and the Huron Tourism Association (HTA). There are many agricultural organizations throughout the county as well.

**Economy - Key considerations**

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- The needs of seasonal residents who only live in Huron part of the time?
- How the seasonal nature of both farming and tourism affects work schedules of local residents?
- How changes to one aspect of the economy can affect the others?
- How to promote better understanding and collaboration between various sectors to build on the strengths of each?
- How the seasonal population will be affected by the initiative?
- How the increase in summer population will be affected by the initiative?
- How the varying employment rates throughout the seasons will be affected by the initiative?
- Accessibility from the perspective of an individual’s finances?

**Economy - Links to Learn More**

Huron Tourism Association  
[http://www.ontarioswestcoast.ca/](http://www.ontarioswestcoast.ca/)

Huron Business Centre  
[http://www.smallbusinesshuron.ca/](http://www.smallbusinesshuron.ca/)

Huron Business Improvement Associations  

Huron Manufacturing Association  
[http://www.huronmanufacturing.ca/](http://www.huronmanufacturing.ca/)

Creative Huron  
[http://www.creativehuron.ca](http://www.creativehuron.ca)
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

As has been mentioned, Huron County benefits from a range of natural features. Lake Huron provides an extensive lakeshore, and numerous rivers, wetlands, and woodlots exist alongside an abundance of prime agricultural land. Huron also has an extensive trail system and over 30 natural areas that are enjoyed by hikers, cyclists, and outdoor enthusiasts.

WEATHER AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

Unsurprisingly, Lake Huron has a big influence on life in Huron County. In the winter, for example, most of the county receives large amounts of snow fall due to the “lake effect” and the fact that the lake doesn’t freeze completely. This causes treacherous driving conditions which may not occur in other parts of rural Ontario, and often lead to road, school, and service closures.

However, like elsewhere, Huron County also faces specific environmental challenges. Beginning in 2005, the Huron County Clean Water Project has resulted in over 1800 projects completed throughout the county. Projects are aimed at reducing erosion caused by wind and water runoff and preventing water contamination from improperly decommissioned wells.

Other completed projects include upgrading or decommissioning manure storage on farms, creating wetlands, diverting water from manure and livestock exercise yards, controlling erosion, implementing stewardship guides, managing storm water runoff, and retiring fragile land from agricultural use.

Landowners, the County and the Environmental Farm Plan have improved the environment:

- Over $5.8 million spent on projects 2005
- Cattle fenced out of 40 km of streams
- More than 150 ha of trees planted
- Almost 90 km of windbreaks
- 289 upgraded wells
- 360 unused wells decommissioned.

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10 Huron Clean Water Project, 2012 Report
Climate change and extreme weather events also present challenges for all communities, including Huron. While the effects of climate change may remain uncertain, there is also the possibility that agriculture in the county may benefit from a warmer climate with higher heat units. This would allow Huron County farmers the option of growing more productive varieties of corn and soybeans. In addition, crops such as grapes that could not be grown here in the past are now being considered as a viable agricultural alternative.\footnote{http://huron.bulletnewscanada.ca/2011/10/18/wine-industry-fermenting-in-huron-county/}

At the same time, however, extreme weather events, challenge municipal infrastructure (e.g. storm water management, road maintenance) and these may be important considerations for planning in the future.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.png}
\caption{Projected agriculture in 2080 due to climate change.}
\end{figure}

\section*{Environment – Key considerations}

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

\begin{itemize}
\item The range of environmental programs available in the county?
\item The health of the lake, soil, and natural areas?
\item Future effects of climate change?
\item Impact on water quality from soil erosion, agricultural runoff, and storm water management?
\item Dependency on single-occupancy vehicles?
\item The challenges associated with Huron County winter weather including added costs for dealing with snow, business and school closure, lower activity levels, and basic challenges getting from place to place?
\end{itemize}

\section*{Environment – Links to Learn More}

Huron County Farm Guide

\url{http://www.huroncounty.ca/econdev/downloads/2013_HuronFarmGuide.pdf}

The Huron County Clean Water Project

\url{http://www.huroncounty.ca/plandev/water.php}
Section 3 –
Considerations for Huron:
PEOPLE & CULTURE
GENERAL POPULATION

Who we are: Demographic/health profile

Huron County is often considered one of the most “rural” regions in the province. There are no urban centres over 8 000 in population and about 60 per cent of the population lives dispersed throughout the country.13

Huron’s population hasn’t changed much over the past 30 years, though the rest of Ontario has grown.14 As is characteristic of many rural areas, however, Huron County exhibits a high dependency ratio, a higher proportion of seniors and a lower proportion of university graduates than the Ontario average.15

Indeed, like many rural communities, Huron is dealing with an aging population. Young people often leave to go to school, and many of them don’t come back. Not only does this mean that the community is older, it also means that there are fewer young people working to support older, retired residents (see Figure 4).

Importantly, more than half of households (55 per cent) in Huron contain only 2 family members, and more than 10 per cent of residents currently live alone.16

Figure 4 – Population Pyramid17

The Huron County Population Pyramid provides a snapshot of the age distribution within the county, divided by gender. The shape is similar to that of the rest of the province and of the country, but the number of seniors is higher. In a population with a lot of young people, this would actually look like a pyramid, with a wide base and a narrower top. Of note, in the Huron County pyramid, there is a higher number of older women than men, as can be seen in the age groups from 75 and over. The “bulge” in the middle represents the age group from 45 to 65 and indicates the group typically described as “baby boomers”.18

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17 Huron County Factsheet 2013
Ethnically, Huron County is composed largely of people of European descent, specifically from England, Scotland, and Ireland, with a strong number also coming from Germany and Holland.\textsuperscript{19} While people who live in Huron generally love the country and small town lifestyle, there can also be challenges associated with rural life.

A third of Huron County residents get their drinking water from private wells, which can be risky.\textsuperscript{20} Small communities have had to make significant investments to develop municipal water services since the water tragedy in Walkerton in 2000. Similarly, and though it may be surprising, Huron actually has a comparable number of smog advisories to Toronto because of its proximity to Michigan.\textsuperscript{21}

In terms of health and wellbeing, Huron County residents report many of the poorer health outcomes and negative health behaviours typical of rural areas: higher rates of smoking and heavy drinking, and higher rates of obesity and chronic diseases (e.g. arthritis, high blood pressure, cancer) when compared to the Ontario average.\textsuperscript{22} While there are multiple reasons for these outcomes, one contributing factor is that rural people must use their vehicles to get around instead of more active forms of transportation.

Also of note, however, is that Huron County residents have a very strong sense of community belonging,\textsuperscript{23} something that is commonly found in many rural, tight-knit communities.

\textbf{General Population – Barriers and Challenges}

\textbf{PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FUNDED ON A PER CAPITA BASIS}

Huron’s aging population presents challenges for servicing the county. Many of the small, rural schools have closed after going through accommodation reviews that divide communities and create animosity, stress, and friction. Provincial funding formulas that are based on a per capita basis, which do not always adequately serve the needs of a rural population, often trigger these reviews. Employment services are also supported on a per capita basis, and as a result, are threatened when the population is not growing.

In addition, many programs and services are delivered and maintained by volunteers. This presents challenges in delivery.

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{19} State of Huron, 2010.
    \item \textsuperscript{20} Community Health Status Report, 2009.
    \item \textsuperscript{21} Community Health Status Report, 2009.
    \item \textsuperscript{22} Statistics Canada. 2013. Health Profile.
    \item \textsuperscript{23} Statistics Canada. 2013. Health Profile.
\end{itemize}
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

While it is largely recognized that future job opportunities rely on a highly skilled labour force, when compared to the provincial level, only half as many individuals report having university-level education compared to the province; though a higher percentage has pursued trades certificates/diplomas. In fact, 30 per cent of the Huron County workforce does not possess a high school diploma.

FAMILIES

Family is important to Huron County residents. It is not unusual for communities to contain many generations of the same family. This can be a source of additional support for some people, however, it can also act as a barrier in terms of privacy and anonymity. Because of the ‘close-knit’ nature of the Huron community, if you don’t know someone who works in the local health clinic, you will probably know someone in the waiting room in one of Huron’s five hospitals. Social stigma, including among family members, may make people more reluctant to seek help for mental health or emotional issues.

Rural women may also face additional challenges when trying to leave abusive situations. Barriers may include distance to services, lack of information, lack of transportation, and lack of affordable childcare. In addition, many rural women report a lack of quality jobs that pay adequately to support themselves. Many of the available jobs are part time or temporary.

COST OF LIVING VS. QUALITY OF LIFE

Huron County residents enjoy a cost of living that is 26 per cent lower than in the rest of Canada. However, this comes at a price: while tax rates may be low, the accompanying loss of services such as health care and rural schools provide a challenge. Rural municipalities may also struggle to provide efficient fire services, which are largely run by volunteers, as the population ages.

25 Woman Abuse and Ontario Works in a Rural Community.
26 http://www.makehuronhome.ca/?page_id=1888
General Population – Strengths and Opportunities

Residents of Huron County have a strong entrepreneurial spirit, with an economy that has been built largely on agriculture, small business, tourism, and the creative economy.

Strong communities with a high number of engaged volunteers help achieve many local initiatives. People care for each other by volunteering in many different ways.

Huron County also has a great cultural atmosphere. Residents have the opportunity to attend live theatre in Blyth and plays at Huron Country Playhouse, as well as attend a variety of festivals, and also many museums and libraries.

In addition, people living in more urban areas envy the number of sports arenas compared to the population size.

A VISION FOR THE COMMUNITY

In 2009, hundreds of community leaders, residents, and organizations developed the following vision statement. It represents the dreams and hopes of the Huron community in a broad sense.

Vision: A Community for Generations

Mission: Huron County is a vibrant and forward thinking community, taking action for a sustainable and prosperous future.
Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- How the initiative will affect or be affected by the current trend towards an aging population?

- That many residents are challenged by transportation issues due to the county’s large geographical area?

- That often extended family members live within close proximity of each other and are closely tied?

- How programs and services are funded?

Links to Learn More

Rural Women Making Change:
http://www.rwmc.uoguelph.ca/news.php?n=61
http://booksnow1.scholarsportal.info/ebooks/oca10/3/whatdoyouseewhen00cana/whatdoyouseewhen00cana.pdf

Rural Response for Healthy Children:
http://rrhc.on.ca

Make Huron Home:
http://www.makehuronhome.ca/?page_id=1888
SENIORS

Who we are: Seniors in Huron County

Seniors are one of Huron’s greatest assets. Seniors (65+) make up a large proportion of the residents in Huron County: nearly 12,000 people representing approximately 20 per cent of the population.

Of these, nearly 25 per cent (2,830 people) live alone, which has important implications for mobility, communication, and isolation.

At the same time, today’s seniors represent a cross-section of society – some may be very active and/or affluent, whereas others may have health or mobility limitations and live on a small, fixed income. Many seniors are actively using the Internet for a variety of purposes, including communication and information seeking.

Seniors – Barriers and Challenges

MOBILITY

Nevertheless, because of age and/or other health concerns, many seniors are limited in their accessibility and mobility. In fact, the ability of seniors to get around plays a major role in most of the barriers and challenges outlined below. Taxis, buses, and shuttles are available in Huron – but the distances often make them more expensive than in other places and some of these services have been reduced over the years. Seniors living in places like Shipka or Zurich will usually have to rely on friends and family for a ride.

Huron County is preparing for the needs of its seniors. A new 31 unit apartment building for seniors has recently been constructed. This adds to the existing apartments at Huronview and Huronlea.

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ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

While country living is often considered to be healthier, the fact is that many rural residents, and particularly seniors, often face serious health challenges. Keeping rural doctors and nurses in the area as well as having to travel longer distances all affect how often seniors in Huron are able to see a doctor. Specialists do come to the area, but they might only come one or two days a month. If people are unavailable or cannot get a ride on that specified day, then the whole process is delayed.

FINANCES (FIXED INCOME)

Living on a fixed income can be a challenge for both rural and urban seniors. However, costs continue to rise, and some amenities cost more in rural areas. Food, gas, insurance, and electricity all cost considerably more than they used to. For single seniors, these higher prices are even more serious. The economic downturn in 2008 pushed even more seniors into the low-income category.

TECHNOLOGY

Most of Huron County now has access to wireless Internet service, and this makes a big difference to rural residents’ lives. Seniors use the Internet to keep in touch with family and friends, read the news, learn about things of interest, and monitor health care. Many seniors feel technology helps them maintain their independence and stay in their own homes longer.

HOUSING

Huron County has a lot of big, old houses. While they can be positive on the landscape, they are often hard to heat, have lots of stairs, and always require maintenance—not ideal for seniors. Huron County gives seniors the choice of having five retirement residences, two long-term care homes, as well as six private long-term care facilities. These vary as to the level of care, independence, and social programs provided.

Huron County has a slightly higher rate of seniors living alone than the rest of the Ontario population. This provides challenges for staying healthy, as seniors who live alone can be more of a target for elder abuse, have a harder time financially, and tend to be more isolated.

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29 Ontario’s Aging Population, 2011.
31 Ontario’s Aging Population, 2011.
GENDER DIFFERENCES

Women tend to face a more difficult time as seniors than do men. Because women tend to live longer, it means they must have more savings after retirement. Many women who were in the workforce often took time off to have children and care for elderly relatives. Many women may also have had part-time or lower paying jobs as it has taken a long time for women’s wages to approach men’s. All of this means that more women end up living in poverty during their senior years. The economic downturn pushed more seniors into poverty, and most of these were women.32

ISOLATION

Becoming isolated is a problem for all seniors. It happens when they lose connections to other people. Retirement, loss of friends and partners, as well as health and mobility issues all increase isolation. This makes a big difference to mental health.33

In rural areas, isolation can be an even bigger problem. Seniors living in small communities often can’t walk to grocery or drug stores, even when they are located in small towns. As more and more rural churches have closed, this has taken away a big part of the community as well as a place where many seniors found purpose through volunteer work.

Winter in Huron County provides additional challenges, especially for seniors. It is harder to walk and to drive, and many seniors worry about slipping and falling in the icy conditions. Many seniors who still drive in the summer are much more anxious about driving in the winter and often give it up altogether. The long, dark days combined with the cold and increased difficulty getting around make winter a tough time for everyone, but especially for seniors.

ELDER ABUSE

Elder abuse is something no one likes to talk about. It is difficult to know how big the problem is in Huron County because often it is not reported. It can be in the form of neglect, emotional, financial, physical, or sexual abuse. It is embarrassing and makes victims feel ashamed because sometimes it comes from people within their own families. Today’s seniors were raised not to complain and to be strong. Often, people just don’t know what to do because they may be reliant on the person who is hurting them.

According to Constable Rob Viani, Community Service Officer, Stratford Police Services: “A lot of elder abuse victims are isolated; they’re not part of a social network. They don’t belong to any groups or even a coffee club.

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32 Ontario’s Aging Population, 2011.
33 Mental Health Needs of an Aging Population.
They’re more reclusive and therefore less informed because of it.”

Elder abuse may be an important consideration when planning programs and services because if seniors are dependent on someone who is abusing them, they may need social services such as transportation, programs, and help with managing their finances even more.

Seniors – Strengths and Opportunities

Huron County seniors are great volunteers. Many organizations in the county depend on retired people to get things done. Many younger seniors volunteer to help older seniors – as this active group ages it will be important to consider whether there are enough younger people stepping up to fill their role.

Huron County volunteers gave more than four million hours of their time – equal to roughly 2,000 full-time jobs.

“In Huron County, 88% of our arts and culture organizations are completely volunteer-run. The national average is 66%.”

– RICK SICKINGER, CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, COUNTY OF HURON

Seniors - Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered...

- That Huron County has a high proportion of seniors who may have health and mobility issues?
- That many younger seniors spend the winter in warmer locations, making engagement more challenging?
- That seniors may be prone to isolation, often as a result of retirement or the death of friends and partners?
- That female seniors are often more financially disadvantaged than male seniors?
- That seniors are often living on a fixed income, so they may be more affected by increases in living costs than others in the community?
- That seniors require different types of housing than people with young families?
- That technology can help seniors retain independence and help reduce issues of isolation, but not all seniors access technology at the same level?
- That elder abuse means seniors may be more dependent on social assistance for transportation, programs, and help managing finances?

Seniors - Links to Learn More

Southwest Healthline
http://southwesthealthline.ca/listCategories.aspx?id=10019

Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse
http://www.cnpea.ca

Make Huron Home
http://www.makehuronhome.ca/?page_id=1888

Huron Community Access Program
http://www.huroncounty.ca/library/cap/links-gals.html

One Care
http://www.onecaresupport.ca/
YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Who we are: Youth in Huron County

Youth and young adults typically constitute those between the ages of 10 and 24, which in Huron is around 11,000 people, or about 19 per cent of the population.\(^\text{35}\)

With limited employment and higher education opportunities, youth may decide to leave Huron for a variety of reasons. Distant places and bigger cities often look more exciting and it is common for youth to leave to go to school and then not come back. However, friends and family connections do continue to bring some young people back to the county.\(^\text{36}\)

Affordable transportation is a big issue for youth on many levels. Living a distance from towns and villages makes it difficult for kids to join teams and clubs, getting jobs, and keeping up with friends. Car accidents also kill a lot more teens compared the rest of the province – in Huron the death rate for motor vehicle collisions is 4 to 5 times the Ontario rate for youth between the ages of 15 and 24.\(^\text{37}\)

One reason for this could be that teens in Huron often have to travel farther distances and many roads still aren’t paved – gravel and speed are a bad combination.

Huron County youth are active in many activities including:

- Scouts Canada,
- Girl Guides of Canada,
- 4-H,
- Junior Farmers,
- Air, Army, and Sea Cadets,
- United Way Youth Council,
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters of North Huron and South Huron also all offer programs for kids and teens.
- Rec centres throughout the county have programs – both during the summer, and on PD days.
- The Blyth Festival young company program.

Youth - Barriers and Challenges

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Huron County has lost a lot of manufacturing jobs in the past few years, and as a result many youth now compete with adults for jobs that used to only be taken by teens. There are still some technical jobs in Huron County, but there aren’t many farm jobs any more. Youth mainly work at jobs related to tourism in the summer, with various campgrounds and restaurants near the beach.

\(^{36}\) Huron County Youth Employment Research Project, 2010.
\(^{37}\) Ontario Injury Data Report, 2012
Because there are no major university or college campuses located within Huron, opportunities for higher education and skills development are limited for youth who remain in in the county.

**MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**

Mental health services for youth is a challenge in much of Ontario, but youth in Huron County may have a particularly difficult time getting help with mental health issues. Along with Grey-Bruce, Huron-Perth is one of the only places in Ontario that doesn’t have beds for kids with acute mental health problems. Youth and their families can seek help in Kitchener or London, but these places often turn people away because they are already stretched to the limit. In some instances, people have even been sent as far away as Ottawa to get help. The only centre available in Huron is shared with Perth County and has a permanent waiting list of 150 children.39

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

As in much of rural Ontario, youth in Huron County continue to indulge in binge drinking at a greater rate than young people in the province overall.40 This is not a new problem in the county, and may result from the lack of entertainment options for youth to engage in. In particular, there are limited options for socializing on the weekends - Goderich is the only place in the county that still has a movie theatre, and this theatre only has two screens.

**AT RISK YOUTH**

While they may remain largely hidden from the broader community, some youth living on their own are present within Huron County. These youth may live with friends, couch surf, or find some other form of temporary place to sleep. Some of them may also have children of their own to look after and worry about. Often these youth will have limited income, few resources and be hard to reach. Texting is the method of choice because many of these young people have a cell phone even if they don’t actually have a permanent place to live.

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38 It Affects Us All, 2008.
39 It Affects Us All, 2008.
40 Community Health Status Report, 2009.
Youth - Strengths and Opportunities

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

People have been working hard to bring more training opportunities to Huron County as youth who learn here are more likely to stay here. Local residents started The Lake Huron Learning collaborative in 2004. This provides young people with the chance to learn locally and improve their skills. There are other education options across the county, with activity in all of the towns. For example, the University of Guelph and Fanshawe College offers courses in various Huron County centres, including the Regional Equine and Agricultural Centre of Huron (REACH) in Clinton. In addition, Georgian College is expanding the courses offered in Seaforth.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Just like in the rest of Canada, hockey is very popular in Huron County. A lot of kids play – but it is expensive and involves a lot of time driving to arenas. It is not unusual for families to travel 75 km or more each way to take kids to games, even for kids playing house league. Nevertheless, because so many families are involved in hockey, local arenas can be a great way to reach a large subset of the population for consultation and communication initiatives.

In addition to hockey, Huron County youth also play baseball and soccer and join teams and clubs at school. There are secondary schools in Clinton, Goderich, Wingham, and Exeter with most schools providing a variety of clubs and teams, although the options are fewer than they were 20 years ago.

Youth - Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- That the recent loss of manufacturing jobs has affected employment opportunities for young people?
- That transportation challenges can result in lost opportunities for Huron County youth?
- That help for mental health issues is not always readily available for youth in Huron County?
- That youth may communicate using different means than adults?
- That there are at risk youth in Huron, even though they are not always visible?
- That binge drinking is still a problem for Huron County youth?
- That negative stereotypes of teenagers can create a sense of exclusion and may affect youth’s decisions to remain in the county?
- That training and mentoring opportunities could help encourage young people to remain in Huron?
Youth - Links to Learn More

Lake Huron Learning Collaborative
http://www.lakehuronlearning.ca

The Centre for Employment and Learning
http://www.thecentreforemploymentandlearning.ca

Children and Youth Mental Health Services and Support Directory
http://mentalhealth4kids.ca

Huron Perth Centre
http://www.hpcentre.on.ca

Goderich-Huron YMCA
http://www.ymcaswo.ca/membership_branches-goderich-huron_ymca.php

Georgian College
http://www.georgiancollege.ca/

Huron Safe Homes for Youth
http://huronsafehomes.com/index.php

REACH Centre
http://reachhuron.ca

Rural Response for Healthy Children
http://rrhc.on.ca/
INDIVIDUALS WITH LOW INCOME

Who we are: People with low income in Huron County

As in other places, poverty is a problem in Huron County. Prior to 2008, average income levels were already lower than that of other Ontarians, and since then Huron has lost many of its best paying jobs.\(^4\) Since 2008, several manufacturers in the area have closed, including Dunline Rubber Products (36 laid off), CanGro (130 laid off), Signal Star Publishing (23 laid off), Volvo Road Machinery (500 laid off), and Wescast Industries also downsized, laying off 230.\(^2\)

Many people who have been laid off have a hard time finding new jobs – and often what they do find pays much less than what they were making before. Many Huron residents can only find seasonal work in the agricultural or tourism industries, which means that for a good part of the year many people are out of work or have their hours reduced.

Struggling to survive on such low income affects people in many ways. Many people are frustrated and get to the point where they have to choose between leaving the community and making a living wage.

From the 2006 Census:

- Huron County’s median household income was $11,000 lower than Ontario median
- 30 per cent of manufacturing jobs have disappeared
- 7.4 per cent of Huron County’s population lived on less than $10,000/year

Low income - Barriers and Challenges

TRANSPORTATION

Geography and lack of public transportation affects all residents of Huron County, but for those with low income, the problem is even worse. A few years ago, many government services including Ontario Works were combined, removing them from small communities and moving them to one regional office, often in Goderich. Even when food banks are located in small towns and settlements, people often struggle to transport the food home. The rising costs of gas and insurance have also made owning a car even more difficult for those with low income. Goderich is the only hospital that delivers babies, so transportation is an issue even before birth.

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\(^4\) Social Audit, 2010.
\(^2\) Social Audit, 2010.
NUTRITION

According to the Huron County Health Unit in 2013, “the weekly cost of groceries for a family of four is now $198.49. That’s an increase of 13 per cent in four years.” 43 As of March 31, 2010, there were two soup kitchens in Goderich and one in Clinton, both of which are relatively new to Huron County. In addition, there are 10 food banks within the county, most run by church communities. Most recently, food bank volunteers have noticed that there are more people using food banks whose Employment Insurance has run out after losing good-paying industrial jobs. Most people find it very difficult to use food banks – to some it feels as if they have finally hit bottom.

HOUSING

It can also be tough to find affordable housing in Huron County. In 2009, there were only 627 social housing units, which are typically full and have long waiting lists to get in. 44

Some of this subsidized housing is in places or buildings where no one would want to live and it is often of varying quality. For example, some people with low income may prefer to live in market rent accommodations because subsidized housing is unsafe or in undesirable neighbourhoods. Depending on their situation, however, others may view subsidized housing as finally giving them a safe place to live. 45 Some people think the old, vacant farm houses in the country are good low-rent alternatives. What they often don’t realize is that these houses are expensive to heat, are located too far from work and services, and can be very isolated.

Low income - Strengths and Opportunities

Huron County contains a number of existing organizations dedicated to helping those with low income. These existing service providers can serve as a valuable foundation for moving forward with supporting low income residents.

As exemplified by the Goderich tornado in 2011, Huron County residents have a strong sense of community and the capacity to come together to help those in need. While residents may not always be aware of low income residents and their needs and obstacles, it can be expected that with improved awareness Huron County residents can work together to help those down on their luck.

43 The Real Cost of Eating Well in Huron County. Huron County Health Unit, 2013.
44 Huron County Health Unit, 2009 Community Health Status Report.
45 Social Audit, 2010.
Low income - Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- That the changing economy means that more Huron County residents are living on low income for the first time in their lives?
- That finding affordable housing can be an obstacle in Huron County?
- That people living on low income have greater challenges with accessing transportation than people who have higher income?
- That people living on low income struggle to achieve adequate nutrition for themselves and their families?
- Partnering with the several existing service providers that exist across Huron County?

Low income - Links to Learn More

Faith to End Poverty
http://www.isarc.ca

Habitat for Humanity
http://www.habitathuroncounty.ca

Huron County Health Unit
http://www.huronhealthunit.ca

Ontario Works
http://www.huroncounty.ca/ontarioworks/

Pathways
http://www.huroncounty.ca/ontarioworks/fa_pathways.php

Poverty Free Ontario
http://www.povertyfreeontario.ca

United Way
http://www.perthhuron.unitedway.ca/

Partners in Employment
http://www.partnersinemployment.on.ca/
INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Who we are: People with disabilities in Huron County

All people have different abilities and skills, and some people may have greater challenges than others. Some people are born with a disability, some people have an illness or accident, and some disabilities come through aging. It is important to recognize that most people will experience some sort of disability throughout their lifetimes.

One important consideration when designing community initiatives is that because not all disabilities are the same, something done to improve the lives of one group may have a negative effect on the lives of others. For example, bumps placed at intersections to alert visually impaired people can be difficult for people in a wheelchair to navigate over. Care in design and consultation with affected people can help reduce these unintended negative consequences.

Barriers and Challenges

ACCESSIBILITY

In Huron County, people with disabilities face many of the same barriers as people in other places; however, one challenge that is especially evident is related to the old heritage buildings. Many people in the county often fear that making heritage buildings accessible for everyone will damage their historical beauty. But it is important to note that this does not have to be the case. A good example is the Brussels Library, which has recently undergone extensive renovations to become fully accessible while still maintaining the appearance of a heritage building (Figure 5).

A similar barrier that is often overlooked is the fact that many businesses in Huron have a single step at the entrance to the store. Notably, one step makes a business just as inaccessible to a person in a wheelchair as 20 steps. A simple wooden ramp, such as that constructed by the Stop Gap movement initiated in Toronto, can make a big difference to the lives of people who have mobility issues. And it can also help businesses welcome customers who would otherwise be excluded, which is a positive outcome for all.
COMMUNICATION AND SIGNAGE

At the same time, positive initiatives that have been taken within the county would be more effective if they came with appropriate signage. For example, stores in downtown Wingham often have accessible back entrances, but there is little advertising to let people know this is an option.

Improved Accessibility in Huron:

- Wingham Downtown Revitalization
- Brussels Library Addition
- New Bayfield Library
- Maitland River Elementary School
- St. Columbian Soccer Building
- Winthrop Baseball Park Washrooms
- Brussels Public Swimming Pool Change Rooms
- Credit Union on Kingston Street in Goderich
- New Sobey's in Zurich
- OPP on the square in Goderich

Figure 5 – Brussels’ library before (top) and during (bottom) renovation. Photos courtesy of Huron County Library Facebook page.
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Programs and services are also somewhat limited for people with disabilities in Huron County. Community Living facilities are located in Wingham, Exeter, Clinton, and Goderich, but only the Central Huron location in Goderich deals with children less than 18 years of age.

In many instances, programs and services are developed first and then 'retrofitted' to accommodate people with disabilities. This slows down project delivery and in some cases, makes the program or service less effective in reaching those who need it in the first place. Including the input of individuals with disabilities from the beginning, when a program or service is in the development stage, would help improve the process and make programs and services more effective.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation in Huron County is another major barrier for people with disabilities. Specialized transportation does exist in Huron County for those with disabilities; however it is not always available for every purpose. For travel outside the mandate of existing service providers, taxis are available, although these are not always accessible to people with physical disabilities. In addition, the cost associated with taking a taxi from one community to another also provides a financial barrier for people living on a fixed income.

HOUSING

There is very little housing in Huron County that is geared to people with disabilities. While there is some available within the county, the waiting lists are long. Rental housing that is affordable to people on a fixed income often has other limitations such as long flights of stairs, high heating costs, or inaccessible location.

ATTITUDES & INCLUSION

Another big barrier for people with disabilities within the county is negative attitudes and persistent stereotypes that some people may have held onto since childhood. Some individuals report that there are still members of the community who think that people with intellectual disabilities should be institutionalized.

“Equality and acceptance with dignity for all” is the pledge developed by Wingham and District Community Living. Inclusion is a main part of the vision of this group. Things are improving in the county, with many of Community Living’s clients now enjoying employment within the local community. This group also works toward inclusive classrooms. While there are still schools within the county that have separate classrooms for developmentally challenged children, classroom integration is growing all the time.
Strengths and Opportunities
Despite these challenges, Huron has been taking steps to change the culture within the county to remove barriers and make life easier for people with disabilities. The Huron County Accessibility Advisory Committee has been established and includes people with mobility, sight, and hearing challenges, as well as people with dwarfism.

There are also groups within the county to support clients with intellectual disabilities, including Community Living groups in North, Central, and South Huron. These groups are also working to remove barriers and to change attitudes in order to make Huron County more accessible and inclusive.

Such initiatives include hosting the second annual National Access Awareness Week that attracted about 200 people. Exeter, Goderich, and Wingham have also all made changes to their downtowns to make them more usable by people with varying disabilities.

In addition, many organizations and businesses have presented their site plans to the Huron County Accessibility Advisory Committee for comment, recommendations and advice (see list below). This is great evidence that accessibility is becoming part of the culture in Huron County.

Community Living in Wingham has also been working on initiatives that are helping to raise awareness within the broader community. They have featured individuals in local papers and have delivered brown bag lunches to businesses in the county. This helps people get to know each other and helps to reduce stigmas that may have been present in the past. Raising awareness through these types of initiatives can further help reduce stereotypes and improves inclusion within all parts of the community.

Key considerations
In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- That attitudes toward people with disabilities may still need to be more inclusive?
- That often initiatives are developed without consulting people with disabilities, then retrofitted to accommodate their special needs afterward?
- That sometimes an improvement for one group of people can have a negative effect on others?
- That transportation and housing options for people with disabilities in Huron County is limited, especially for those living on low income?
- That care needs to be taken to ensure that effective communication reaches all residents, regardless of ability?
- That residents in need of services may have difficulty or be unable to communicate it?
Links to Learn More

Community Living Central Huron
http://www.clch.ca

Community Living South Huron
http://www.clsh.ca

Wingham and District Community Living
http://www.wdcla.org

One Care: Home and Community Support Services
https://www.onecaresupport.ca/Services/EasyRide

Stop Gap
http://stopgapblog.blogspot.ca/p/community-ramp-project.html

WOTCH Huron County
http://wotch.org/connect-services/huron-county

Canadian Mental Health Association of Huron-Perth
http://www.cmha-hp.on.ca/
MINORITY GROUPS

Who we are: Minority groups in Huron County

People who belong to minority groups may be visible or ‘invisible’ in terms of their minority status. Visible minorities, as defined by Statistics Canada, make up a very small proportion of the Huron County community. In 2006, only 1.5 per cent of residents in Huron were visible minorities compared to nearly 23 per cent in Ontario. More recent estimates may be less reliable since they are not based on a Census, however, according to the 2011 National Household Survey, there are were only 475 visible minority residents in Huron, which is less than 1 per cent of the population.

Most, though not all, visible minority residents are newcomers to Canada. According to the NHS, in 2011 there were over 4 200 total immigrants living in Huron, however only 215 of these were recent immigrants arriving in Canada since 2006.

Most immigrants living in Huron are originally from Europe, and nearly 5 000 residents report having a non-official language as a mother tongue—mostly Dutch and German.

In fact, the Orthodox Mennonite Church as well as Amish community make up the largest minority group in Huron. German is their first language – with over 2,200 people claiming German as their first language. Both of these groups believe that they should live in the community, but apart from it. Their religious beliefs determine their

From the 2006 Census:

Immigrant Population
- 8 per cent in Huron County
- 28.3 per cent in Ontario

Visible Minority
- 1.5 per cent in Huron County
- 22.8 per cent in Ontario

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46 Persons, other than Aboriginal people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.
lifestyle, which largely avoids many of the conveniences of the modern world.

People from both communities largely moved to Huron in the 1970s and have developed their own schools and churches. In some places they may be particularly concentrated: there is a Mennonite community of about 120 families living in Howick Township and a community of 100 Amish families living in the St. Helens area.

This community is facing similar challenges as the rest of the farming community in Huron County when it comes to purchasing land and operating sustainable operations. Land is very expensive and it is challenging to pay for at current commodity prices. As a result, some are looking elsewhere for affordable farm land. Members of these communities do not belong to farm organizations within the county.

Minority Groups – Barriers and Challenges

LACK OF MULTI-ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

For newcomers to Canada, moving to Huron County may involve a variety of adjustments and challenges. One barrier to attracting newcomers to the area may be the lack of an existing multi-cultural community and the amenities that are associated with different ethnic groups (i.e. access to cultural foods), as well as language skills and communication. Depending on their religion, some newcomers to Huron may also face limited places of worship for some types of faiths, since the predominant religion in the area is Christian.

ADJUSTING TO A RURAL LIFESTYLE

Another barrier that may be overlooked is that fact that many immigrants and newcomers come from urban areas in their home countries and are thus more comfortable in cities. They also may not have a license or know how to drive a car (or at least have money to purchase one). Furthermore, the lack of exposure to visible minorities and the tight-knit community could also be seen as an obstacle to being accepted by local residents.
Mennonite and Amish communities deliberately separate themselves from the greater community. Their needs are met largely by strong community support and mutual aid. They less likely to use basic social services.

Getting good information to these communities is more difficult because their access to information is limited to word of mouth and printed materials.

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

People in the Mennonite and Amish communities do not have telephones in their homes. When they go to a phone to seek services, they often get an answering machine requesting a call back number. They do not have a method for receiving returned calls. This makes it especially difficult for people with health challenges.

Mennonite and Amish children speak German as their first language and do not learn English until they start school at age 6. Because of this, health service providers find it difficult to provide health care and social services, if necessary.

Another consideration in terms of communication and outreach is that the Mennonite and Amish communities do not change their clocks in the spring and fall. As a result, people hoping to meet with them or include them in meetings need to remember that during the summer, there is an hour difference between their community and the broader Huron County community.

While meal time meetings often encourage the attendance of the general population, this is not the case for the Mennonite and Amish.

The community does access local newspapers, so this is one method of providing them with information. They also receive information through their churches. Written information provided to these communities is more acceptable if it has fewer graphics, and as with the general population, simple language is more easily understood.

In 2011, Huron County completed an immigration strategy. It provides an overview of how immigration could impact the economic development of the County. (huroncounty.ca)
TRANSPORTATION

People who use horses for transportation think about travel in a much different way than the broader Huron community. For the Amish living near St. Helens and going to Wingham, a distance of only nine miles takes one hour in summer weather. Similarly, going to the Co-op in Belgrave, about six miles away takes around 45 minutes. If people need to go further, this group will call neighbours who have cars or an individual who provides an informal taxi service, which is charged by the kilometre.

There is also a network of volunteers who will drive Huron County residents to health care appointments in London. While there used to be regular, dependable bus service, members of these communities now report that there are few buses and the route that drivers take can change without notice. This is frustrating for people who have travelled to get to a specific pick-up place, only to find the bus went a different route that day. Getting to the hospital is also difficult in the case of emergency. Traffic concerns are a problem in rural Huron County and members of these communities are part of a regional Anabaptist safety committee formed to address traffic issues.

URBAN AREAS

Another important consideration to keep in mind is that some areas of the county are better than others for Mennonite and Amish people. Wingham has several areas for tying horses and the distances to services are walkable. Goderich, however, is not as accessible for this community. People in this community have reported that Goderich is not a town to go into with a buggy because it is dangerous. This is largely due to the fact that access to Goderich from the north includes crossing the river on a bridge that has a lot of traffic and there is no quiet “back way” into town. While this is probably not something that can be changed easily, it is something to consider when and planning services, programs and outreach.
Minority Groups – Strengths and Opportunities

IMMIGRANTS AND VISIBLE MINORITIES

As a result of community consultations in 2008 and 2009, Huron has initiated a Local Immigration Strategy in order to attract new people to move to the county. The Immigration Strategy is divided into four main themes: attraction, settlement services and programs, inclusion, communication and marketing.

The consultation that occurred while developing the strategy found that new immigrants who came to Huron County tended fare better if they had an agricultural background, bought a business here, had a job already here before they moved, or already had social capital here.²⁵²

These efforts to attract and retain newcomers in Huron County are a major opportunity to increase the diversity of the community. As more and more immigrants and/or visible minorities chose to make Huron their home, residents will become better at opening up and welcoming newcomers to the community.

MENNONITES AND AMISH

While they may not communicate much with the larger community in Huron County, there are Mennonite and Amish people throughout North America and they are well connected to each other. These are tightly knit communities that take care of each other. They are resourceful and can maintain their lifestyle even as the world around them changes.

Mennonite and Amish people are typically farmers, but most families also have some other form of side industry in order support their families. They operate sawmills, make furniture, and sell produce and baking. Orthodox Mennonite and Amish families do not have electricity in the house and use horses both for transportation and for field work. While others in Huron may think that this lifestyle provides barriers associated with transportation and communication, these are not considered barriers within the community.

²⁵² An Immigration Strategy for Huron County.
Minority Groups – Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- That Huron County is actively trying to attract new immigrants and be more welcoming?
- That English as Second Language courses and interpretive services will help new immigrants feel more at home?
- Ways to make the initiative more inclusive for people new to the community?
- That people in the Mennonite and Amish communities may read the local newspaper, but they don’t have access to telephones to receive call backs?
- That people in the Mennonite and Amish communities either use horse and buggies for transportation or rely on bus service or an informal network of neighbours with cars?
- That not all urban areas are equally accessible within the county?

Minority Groups – Links to Learn More

Settlement.org  
http://www.settlement.org

Make Huron Home  
http://www.makehuronhome.ca

Mennonite Central Committee – Ontario Chapter  
http://mcco.ca/
FARMERS

Who we are: Farmers in Huron County

Farming has changed a lot over the years – farms are bigger now and fewer people are needed to work on them then in the past. While there is some organic production in the county, conventional agriculture still continues to dominate.

Modern farm equipment is big, takes up space on roads, and is highly technical. Land prices are another big change. A 100-acre farm may now sell for $1 million, but is challenging to pay for at current commodity prices.

Huron County farmers operate in a global market and are affected by a lot more than just climate change. Canadian agriculture was affected much the same way as Canadian manufacturing when the Canadian dollar value changed relative to the US dollar. Canadian regulations guarantee minimum wage, safe food, and environmental responsibility, yet when consumers go to the grocery store they often choose cheaper imports over food grown in Canada.

Farmers – Barriers and Challenges

SUCCESSION

Every year, the age of the average farmer gets older and most young people are either unwilling or unable to take over family farms. As such, succession is often a major source of stress for farm families. Large amounts of money are involved and farmers often have adult children who have pursued other careers away from the farm. Young people are faced with being responsible for multi-million dollar operations that have been built over several generations, but see their friends taking jobs that offer regular hours, time off, and less responsibility.

53 2011 Census of Agriculture and Strategic Policy Branch, OMAFRA
SEASONALITY OF WORK

Seasonality of farm work in itself can cause stress. While many farmers may need to hire labour for a few months of the year during planting and harvest seasons, they often don't have year-round work to hire full-time staff. This often means that farmers and farm workers do ‘double duty’ during the busy season. This increases the stress level, the chances for accidents, as well as feelings of isolation. Farmers can miss out on time with family and friends because farming is not a ‘9 to 5’ job – no two farms are the same, and the work varies a lot with the weather and the seasons.

When planning certain initiatives, it is important to keep in mind that farmers often give up their regular activities during busy times. Overlooking the seasonal nature of agriculture may further increase the disconnect between farmers and non-farmers in Huron County.

SRESS IN AGRICULTURE

Farmers traditionally consider themselves to be strongly independent. Even talking about mental health issues carries stigma within the farming community. However, farming can be a very stressful career. The work is physically and mentally demanding, the hours are long, and it remains one of the most dangerous professions. If the farm fails, farmers stand to lose their jobs, their homes, and often, their life savings. When BSE closed the border to Canadian beef, suicide hotlines were set up throughout the agricultural community in Ontario. While statistics are not readily available, it is easy to guess that mental health issues in the farming community go widely undiagnosed.

Huron County has the advantages of:
- Informed and progressive farm community
- Supportive service sector
- High capability soils
- Diversified agricultural industry
- A favourable climate,
- Limited non-farm intrusion.

Agriculture has a significant positive economic impact that goes beyond the farm gate and rural areas into Huron’s towns and villages. (Huron County Official Plan, 2013).
Farmers – Strengths and Opportunities

Agriculture dominates the landscape of Huron County. 86 per cent of the land here is farmed and Huron leads all counties and regions in Ontario for the total value of production. Crops, fruits, vegetables, livestock, maple syrup, dairy and eggs are all grown in the county. The John Deere dealership in Exeter is one of the largest partnerships in Canada.

Farmers – Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- That during the busy seasons of spring, summer, and fall most farmers are too busy to come to community meetings?

- That many farm families will be struggling with succession issues now and in the future?

- The sometimes uneasy relationships emerge between farmers and tourists?

- That agriculture is a major economic driver in Huron County that needs to be protected and supported?

- That social and mental health issues can be a challenge to some in the farming community, but there is still reluctance to seek help?

- That cuts to social programs have added extra burden to farm families for child and elder care?

Farmers – Links to Learn More


Huron County Federation of Agriculture http://www.hcfa.on.ca

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54 Community Health Status Report, 2009.
REFERENCES


Section 4 – INTERACTIVE WORKSHEET
GETTING STARTED...

STEP 1: What are the INTENDED consequences of your initiative?

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STEP 2: What could be the UNINTENDED consequences of your initiative? *These can be positive or negative!

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STEP 3: Geography - Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- How will your initiative be accessible to residents living in all parts of the county?
- Have you accounted for the increased cost of delivering services to a dispersed population?
- Are there opportunities to partner with existing service providers to deliver your initiative?
- Can portions, or all, of your initiative use alternative service delivery methods, such as online (where appropriate)?
- Will residents require transportation to access your initiative? What about those in the county who lack transportation access?
- That access to services is different across the county depending on proximity to urban areas?
STEP 4: Economy - Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- The needs of seasonal residents who only live in Huron part of the time and those who live in Huron year round?
- How the seasonal nature of both farming and tourism affects work schedules of local residents?
- How changes to one aspect of the economy can affect the others?
- How to promote better understanding and collaboration between various sectors to build on the strengths of each?
- How the seasonal population will be affected by the initiative?
- How the increase in summer population will be affected by the initiative?
- How the varying employment rates throughout the seasons will be affected by the initiative?
- Accessibility from the perspective of an individual’s finances?

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STEP 5: Environment – Key considerations

In developing this initiative, have you considered…

- The range of environmental programs available in the county?
- The health of the lake, soil, and natural areas?
- Future effects of climate change?
- Impact on water quality from soil erosion, agricultural runoff, and storm water management?
- Dependency on single-occupancy vehicles?
- The challenges associated with Huron County winter weather including added costs for snow removal, business and school closure, lower physical activity levels, and basic challenges getting from place to place?
STEP 6: Consider the initiative and its possible impacts on the following groups.

If yes or not sure, please read section providing background information on this population and answer key considerations for each section. Reading the section will help provide increased awareness to some challenges faced by each population that may not be considered by someone who is not that familiar with them.

- General population  ->  Review section beginning on pg 22
- Seniors  ->  Review section beginning on pg 27
- Youth  ->  Review section beginning on pg 32
- Individuals with Low Income  ->  Review section beginning on pg 36
- Individuals with Disabilities  ->  Review section beginning on pg 39
- Minority Groups  ->  Review section beginning on pg 44
- Farmers  ->  Review section beginning on pg 50
STEP 7: ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION OF THE COMMUNITY

Have rural residents generally, and groups at risk specifically, been directly consulted during the development of this initiative?

- Consider intended and unintended impacts with specific attention to the groups described in the Rural Lens.
- People with disabilities often feel as if initiatives are developed first, then adapted to their special needs afterward.

Have you considered populations that are likely to be missed by conventional methods of consultation (e.g. general public meetings, online feedback) and addressed barriers to their participation?

- Consider using staff or community agencies with experience in specific communities to help with outreach.

Have you considered ways to address barriers to people’s participation in the consultation?

- Consider that portions of Huron’s population have seasonal constraints that provide a barrier to participation. (e.g. farmers, those involved with tourism, and “snowbirds”).
- Consider barriers such as lack of child care, transportation, safety, language, accessible location, time, multiple formats, culturally appropriate, literacy, seasonality)

Have you made efforts to ensure that the consultation method being used creates an environment where everyone is comfortable sharing their views? (e.g. youth, seniors, Mennonites and Amish, people living in poverty)
Have you considered community organizations with existing communication methods that may be utilized?

- Consider that community organizations may also be the audience of your communications depending on what population they serve.

Have you considered alternative delivery options (e.g. online) and their appropriateness given your target audience?
STEP 8: PLANNING AND DEVELOPING INITIATIVES

Have the most likely positive and negative effects on rural residents been identified and, where relevant, addressed?

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Have you attempted to maximize the benefits of this initiative to rural residents through the use of local solutions for local problems?

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Have you assessed the higher costs of delivery in rural areas (e.g. geographic distances, dispersed populations) and incorporated this into the design of your initiative?

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Have you considered the resources (human, financial, time) that will be required to implement this initiative?

- Consider ways to draw upon the contributions and assets of the people most affected by your initiative (e.g. volunteer culture, strong community cohesion)

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Have you considered innovative ways of pooling resources? (e.g. partnering with other community groups, collaborating across branches, seeking matching funds)

- Explore opportunities to partner with existing service providers, community groups, and other levels of government in order to more effectively and efficiently implement your initiative

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Have you considered the impacts that this initiative might have on minority populations (i.e. immigrants, Mennonites, or Amish communities) as well as unique opportunities for more effective delivery in these communities?

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Have you considered alternative delivery options (e.g. online) and their appropriateness given your target audience?

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Have you considered how improvements to the quality of life of rural residents could be measured and what indicators might be built into the initiative from the beginning?

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STEP 9: TALLY YOUR RESPONSES…

**More YES than NO?** If so, you are well on your way to development of a positive initiative. But look for some ways it could be improved. Go back and determine if there are any changes that could increase the number of “Yes” responses.

**More NO than YES?** If so, you may want to re-examine your initiative for content and overall intent. Many rural considerations have not been adequately addressed.

**More NOT SURE than either YES or NO?** You need to gather more information before proceeding with your initiative. Consider gathering further input from rural stakeholders and experts on the initiative to ensure what you are proposing will be beneficial.

**More NOT APPLICABLE than either YES or NO?** Go back and critically examine your initiative. Are there really this many categories that do not apply? Or does much of the initiative not apply to the needs, wants, and concerns of the rural population for whom it is intended?