Community Profile

An analysis of demographic and health equity data in the Southwestern Public Health region

Author

Sarah Croteau, MPH
Epidemiologist
Foundational Standards
Southwestern Public Health

Reviewers

Jenny Santos, MSc
Epidemiologist
Foundational Standards
Southwestern Public Health

Carolyn Richards, MSc
Program Manager
Foundational Standards and Sexual
Health
Southwestern Public Health

Ashley Vito, MSc
Data Analyst
Foundational Standards
Southwestern Public Health

David Smith, MBA, CHE
Program Director
Healthy Foundations
Southwestern Public Health

Cynthia St. John, MBA
Chief Executive Officer
Executive Leadership
Southwestern Public Health

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Contents

Summary

- The Southwestern Public Health region had significant population growth between 2016 and 2021, largely driven by intraprovincial migration

- The population is aging; The proportion of the population aged 65 and over is increasing, while the proportion aged 19 and under is decreasing

- Germanic languages are the most common languages spoken at home, besides English, in the region and the individuals who speak these languages are concentrated within a few municipalities

- The most common places of birth of recent immigrants have changed, with many now born in India

- The proportion of the SWPH population that belong to a visible minority group doubled between 2016 and 2021 but remains much lower than the province

- While there was an increase in the proportion of households in higher income categories from 2015 to 2020, temporary COVID-19 related benefits were likely one of the reasons contributing to this shift

- While the overall level of food insecurity in the region was comparable to the province, SWPH had a higher proportion of households that were moderately and severely food insecure

- About 1 in 4 dissemination areas in the region have high material deprivation (a measure closely linked to poverty) and the most deprived areas in the region tend to be in the southeast and in urban centres

Demographics

Population Size and Growth

According to the most recent census (2021), there were 216,533 people living in the Southwestern Public Health (SWPH) region. The population grew by 8.4% since the previous census was conducted in 2016. This population growth was 2.5x higher than the growth seen between the 2011 and 2016 census. In 2021, the population of Oxford County was 121,781, while the population of Elgin County (including St. Thomas) was 94,752. While both Elgin and Oxford counties saw growth between 2016 and 2021, Oxford County experienced higher population growth (9.9%) compared to Elgin County (6.5%). The population growth across the SWPH region was higher compared to the province at 5.8%.

Data Source: The demographics section of this report uses data from the Census of the Population conducted by Statistics Canada.

When examining population growth by municipality between 2016 and 2021 (Figure 1), it is evident that Tillsonburg and Woodstock experienced the highest population growth at 17.3% and 13.6%, respectively. In fact, Statistics Canada named both Tillsonburg and Woodstock as two of the top 10 fastest growing small urban centres across Canada.[1]

Figure 1. 2021 Population Size and Growth by Municipality, SWPH Region
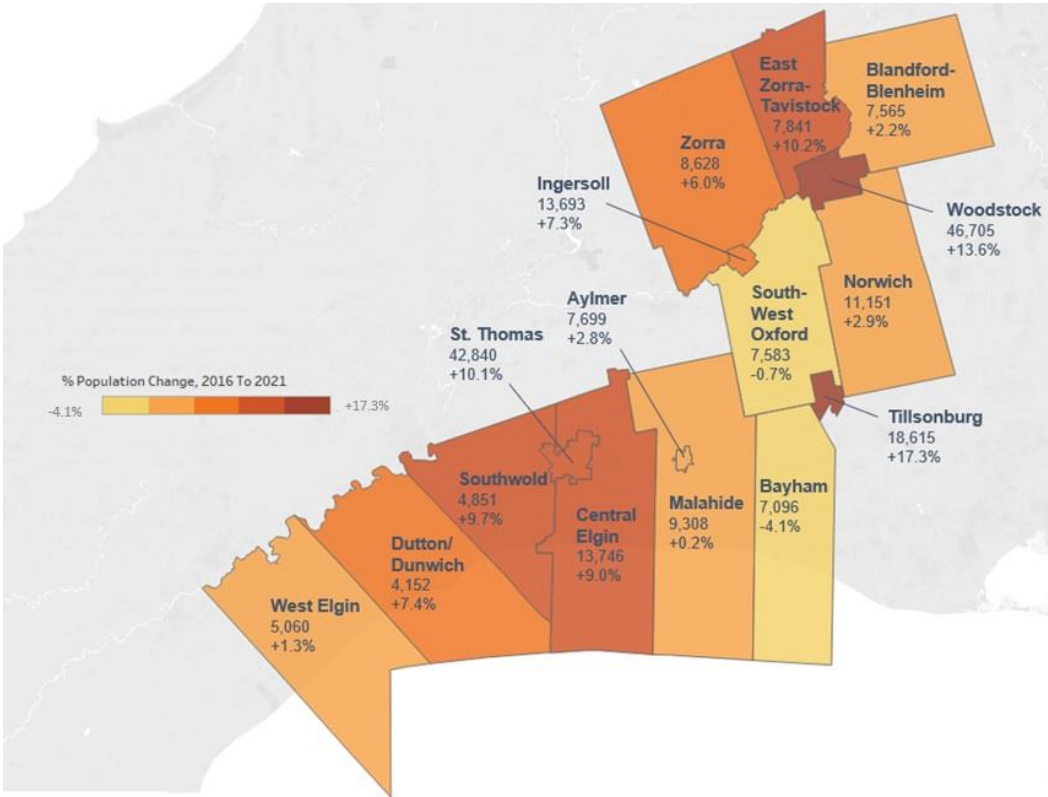
What is Driving Population Growth?

Intraprovincial migration refers to people moving to a different city or town but staying within the same province. This was the number one factor driving population growth between 2016 and 2021 in the SWPH region. It is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic was a major driver of intraprovincial migration, having an impact on how we live and work. In 2021, Statistics Canada estimated that 4 in 10 jobs could be done from home.[2] The ability to work from home creates greater flexibility in where people live in proximity to their workplace. This meant that some people had the opportunity to move away from large urban centres to smaller cities and towns with lower costs of living.

Population Age and Sex

Proportionately, the SWPH region had slightly more children and youth (0-19 years) and older adults (65+ years) compared to Ontario in 2021 (Figure 2). Examining age groups by municipality, Tillsonburg had the highest proportion of people aged 65 and over (29.3%), while Bayham had the highest proportion of people aged 19 and under (33.9%) (Appendix A).
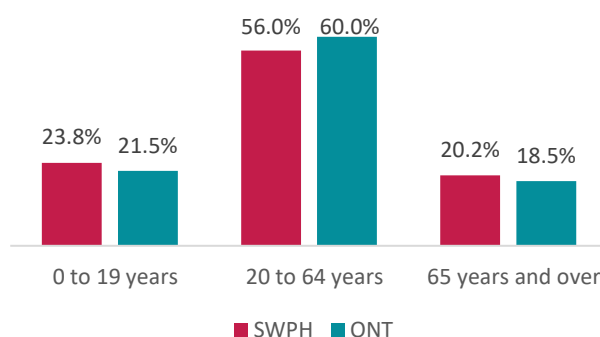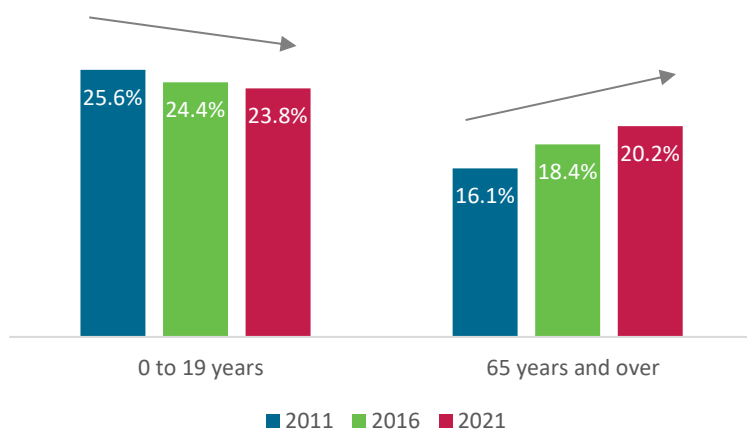
Figure 2. Age Groups, SWPH Region and Ontario, 2021

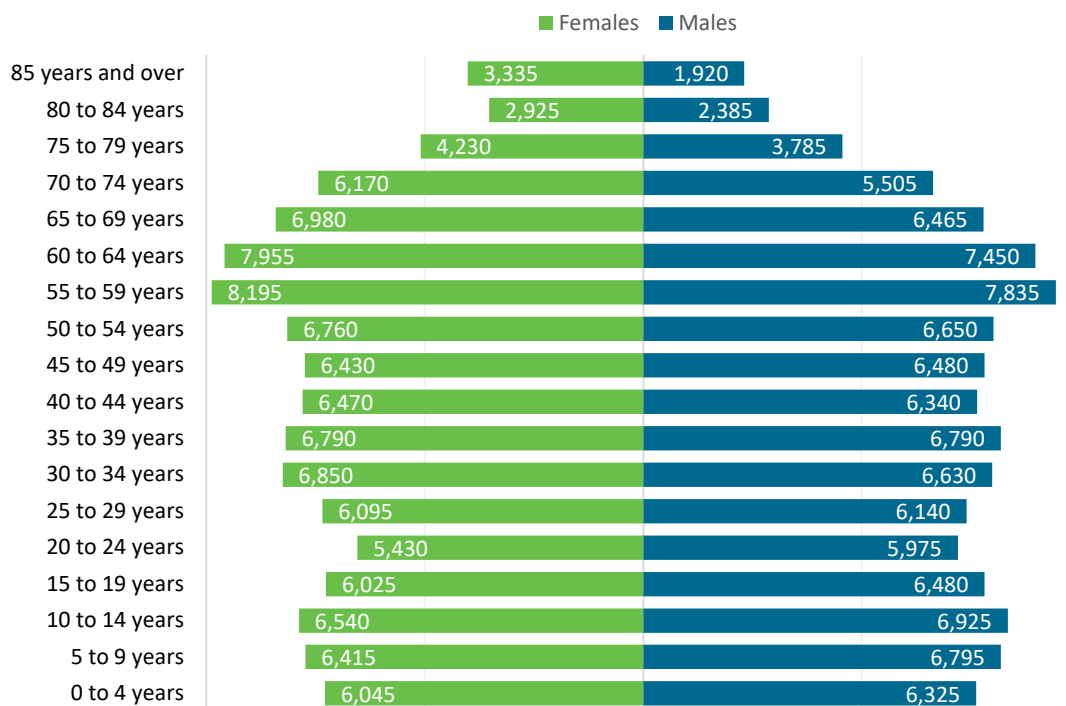

Figure 3. Age Groups, SWPH Region, 2011-2021

Overall, the population is aging, which mirrors nationwide trends. Between 2011 and 2021, the proportion of the SWPH population aged 65 and over grew from 16.1% to 20.2% while the proportion of children and youth aged 19 years and under decreased from 25.6% to 23.8% (Figure 3).

Though an aging population is not a new concept, the working-age population (15 to 64 years) has never been older (Figure 4). In 2021, the baby boomer generation included people aged 57 to 75 and by 2029 this whole generation will be of retirement age. This shift in age structure is also due to low fertility rates and a gradual increase in life expectancy. According to Statistics

Canada, even a large increase in immigration would not significantly curb the projected decrease in working-age Canadians.[3]

*Figure 4. Population Pyramid, SWPH Region, 2021*

■ Females ■ Males

Age	Females	Males
85 years and over	3,335	1,920
80 to 84 years	2,925	2,385
75 to 79 years	4,230	3,785
70 to 74 years	6,170	5,505
65 to 69 years	6,980	6,465
60 to 64 years	7,955	7,450
55 to 59 years	8,195	7,835
50 to 54 years	6,760	6,650
45 to 49 years	6,430	6,480
40 to 44 years	6,470	6,340
35 to 39 years	6,790	6,790
30 to 34 years	6,850	6,630
25 to 29 years	6,095	6,140
20 to 24 years	5,430	5,975
15 to 19 years	6,025	6,480
10 to 14 years	6,540	6,925
5 to 9 years	6,415	6,795
0 to 4 years	6,045	6,325

Language

While the vast majority of the SWPH population can conduct a conversation in English (99.4%), 5.9% of the population report primarily speaking a different language at home. Locally, Germanic languages are the most common languages spoken at home, besides English. While 2.0% of the overall population predominantly speak a Germanic language within their home, these individuals are concentrated within a few communities. Bayham has the highest proportion of the population that primarily speak a Germanic language within their home at 15.1%, followed by Malahide at 12.8% and Aylmer at 9.0% (Figure 5). Many of these individuals are likely part of the Amish or Mennonite communities.

Figure 5. Proportion of the Population that Speaks a Germanic Language Most Often at Home, SWPH Region, 2021
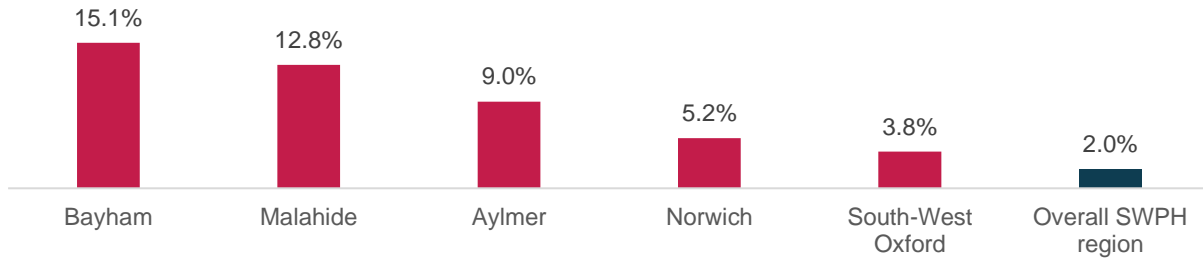
Immigration

Locally, 1 in 10 people in the region are immigrants (11.5%), but only 1.0% are recent immigrants (approximately 2,160 individuals). In the 2021 census, recent immigrants are defined as people who immigrated between 2016 and 2021 (time between census cycles). In 2021, almost half of recent immigrants (44%) lived in Woodstock.

The most common places of birth among the recent immigrant population have changed compared to 2016. In 2016, most recent immigrants in the SWPH region were born in Mexico (31.3%), while in 2021, most were born in India (27.3%) (Table 1). Proportionately, over 8x more recent immigrants were born in India in 2021 compared to 2016.

Table 1. Most Common Places of Birth Among Recent Immigrants, SWPH Region, 2016 and 2021

Recent Immigrants, 2021	Recent Immigrants, 2016
India: 27.3%	Mexico: 31.3%*
Mexico: 12.5%*	United States: 11.7%
United States: 9.3%	Philippines: 8.3%
Jamaica: 5.8%	Jamaica: 5.0%
Philippines: 5.6%	India: 3.3%

*Many of these individuals are likely part of the Mennonite community

Visible Minorities

The proportion of the SWPH population that belongs to a visible minority group doubled between 2016 and 2021 but remains much lower than the province. Visible minorities, which doesn't include Indigenous people, accounted for 6.3% of the SWPH population in 2021, compared to 3.1% in 2016. In 2021, the proportion of visible minorities residing in the SWPH region (6.3%) was much lower than the proportion of visible minorities residing in Ontario (34.3%) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Proportion of the Population Belonging to a Visible Minority Group, SWPH Region & Ontario, 2021

SWPH Region (1 in 16)   Ontario (1 in 3)

Indigenous Population

The proportion of the SWPH population that identified as Indigenous (off-reserve) on the 2021 census is similar to the province and hasn't changed much over time. About 2.3% of the local population identified as Indigenous in 2021, compared to Ontario at 2.9%. It is important to note that permission was not given by the two nearby reserves (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation and Oneida Nation of the Thames) to conduct the census.

Health Equity

The health of the population is influenced by many factors including lifestyle choices and behaviours, genetics and the environment. The physical, social and economic environment all contribute to the health of individuals and the health of the population overall. The social determinants of health refer to factors beyond individual behaviours and genetics that greatly influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age and include income, education, employment, housing and food security, among others. Health equity is when everyone has fair access and opportunity to reach their full health potential.[4]

"Health equity means that all people can reach their full health potential and are not disadvantaged from attaining it because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class, socioeconomic status or other socially determined circumstance" -Health Equity Guideline, 2018, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care [4]

Income and Employment

Between 2015 and 2020, there was a decrease in the proportion of local households in lower income categories and an increase in higher income categories, which mirrored a Canada-wide trend (Figure 7 and Figure 8). Across Canada, the median household after-tax income grew by 9.8%, which is over twice the growth experienced between 2010 and 2015 (4.5%).[5] Temporary COVID-19 related benefits, which began in 2020, may have been one of the reasons contributing to this shift. According to Statistics Canada, 2 out of every 3 Canadians benefitted from at least one pandemic relief program in 2020.[6]

Figure 7. Household After-Tax Income, SWPH Region, 2015 and 2020

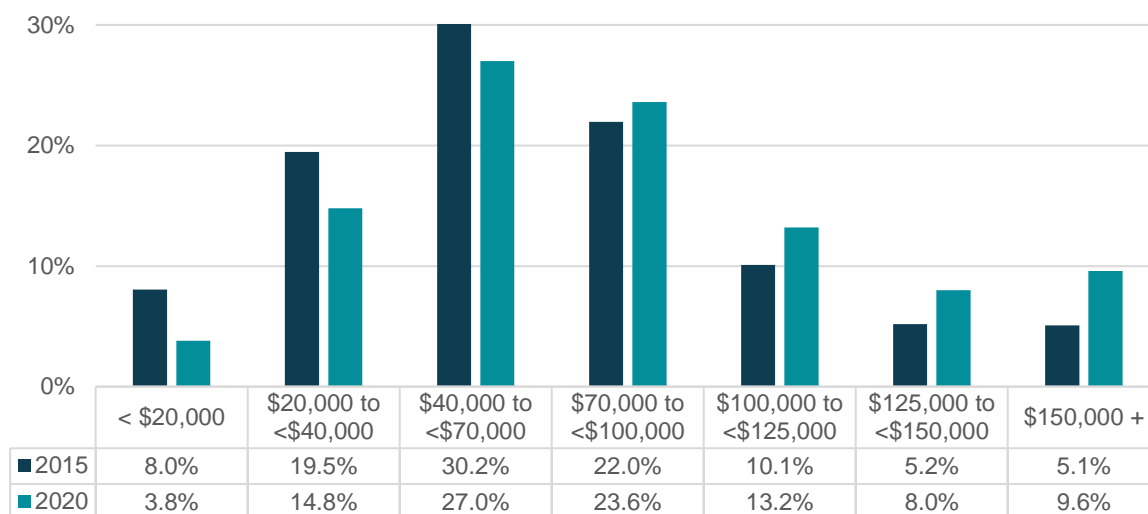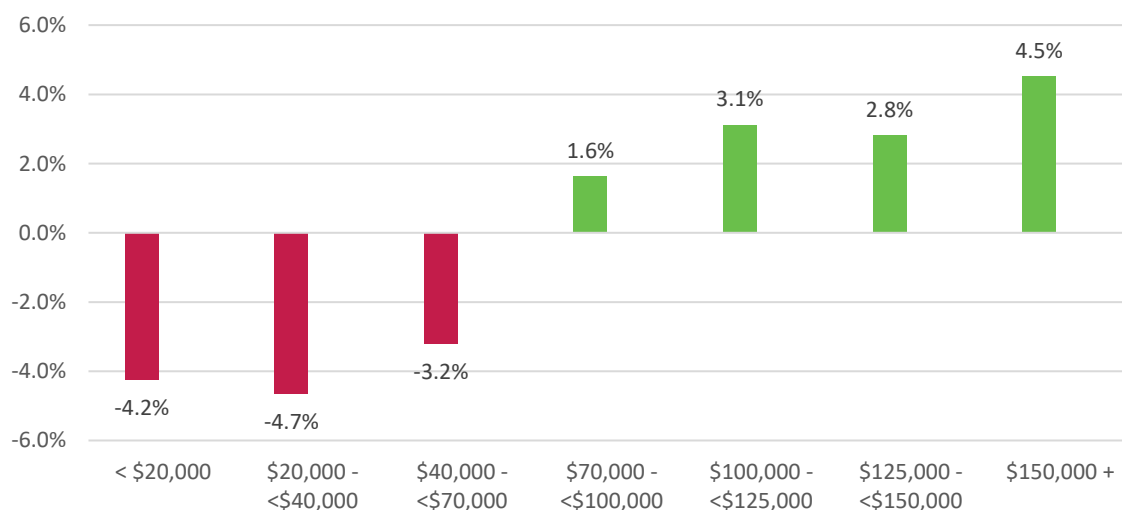|	< $20,000	$20,000 to <$40,000	$40,000 to <$70,000	$70,000 to <$100,000	$100,000 to <$125,000	$125,000 to <$150,000	$150,000 +
■ 2015	8.0%	19.5%	30.2%	22.0%	10.1%	5.2%	5.1%
■ 2020	3.8%	14.8%	27.0%	23.6%	13.2%	8.0%	9.6%

Figure 8. Difference Between the Proportion of Households in Each After-Tax Income Category, SWPH Region, 2015 and 2020

The low-income measure after tax (LIM-AT) is a relative measure of poverty. In 2020, according to the LIM-AT, a 1-person household earning $26,503 or less per year or a 4-person household earning $53,005 or less per year would be considered low-income (Appendix B). The proportion of the SWPH population considered low-income using this measure was 8.8% in 2020, which was lower than the proportion considered low-income in 2015 (12.4%). It's important to note this does not reflect the proportion of the population who are struggling to make ends meet. In 2023, the total basic cost of living for a family of 4 was estimated to be approximately $78,000 annually in the London Elgin Oxford region.[7]

In 2021, about 1 in 5 people (19.3%) living in the SWPH region worked in the manufacturing industry. Other common employment industries included health care and social assistance (12.0%), retail trade (10.1%) and construction (9.2%). The distribution of employment by industry in the region was similar in 2016 compared to 2021.

Education

The proportion of the population with higher levels of education in the SWPH region is increasing. Between 2011 and 2021, the proportion of people with less than a high school education decreased by almost 5%, while the proportion with a secondary or postsecondary education increased (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Highest Level of Education for the Population Aged 15 Years and Over, SWPH region, 2011-2021
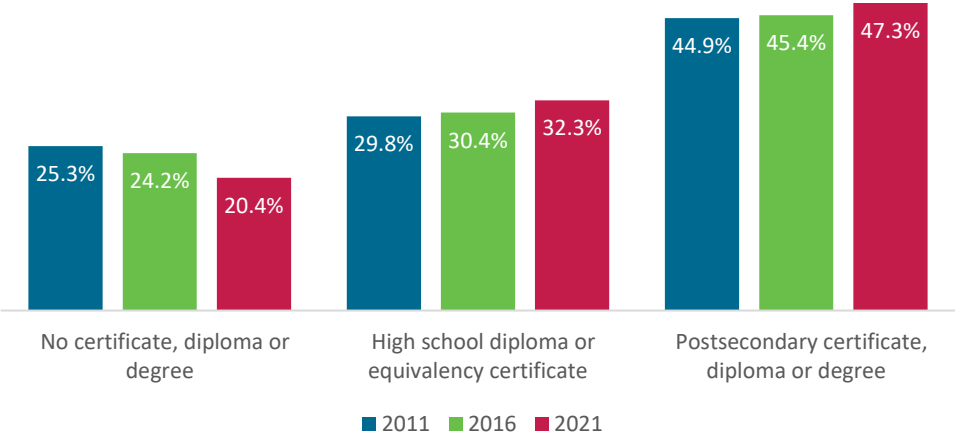
Housing and Household Types

In 2021, most households within the region housed one family, without additional people (66.3%), followed by one-person households at 25.3%. Among families with children, 14.6% were one-parent families, which was slightly lower than the province at 17.1%. Locally, most one-parent families were led by women (76.0%).

The census also collects information about the condition of private dwellings. Locally, 5.4% of homes needed major repairs, which includes repairs for defective plumbing or electrical wiring for example, which was similar to the province at 5.7%.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity refers to inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. An individual's health and wellbeing are tightly linked to their household food security status. Household food insecurity is associated with worse mental health, higher rates of disease and injuries, greater health care utilization and premature mortality.[8] Almost 1 in 6 households (17.5%) in the SWPH region were food insecure between 2018 and 2020 (Figure 10).

> **Data Source:**
> The food insecurity section of this report uses data from the Household Food Security Survey Module on the Canadian Income Survey conducted by Statistics Canada

Figure 10. Household Food Insecurity, SWPH Region, 2018-2020

The overall level of food insecurity in the region was comparable to the province (17.5 % locally vs. 16.7% provincially). However, the SWPH region had a higher proportion of households that were moderately and severely food insecure (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Household Food Insecurity, SWPH region and Ontario, 2018-2020

	Marginally Food Insecure	Moderately Food Insecure	Severely Food Insecure
Ontario	4.7%	7.8%	4.3%
SWPH region	2.3%	9.2%	6.1%
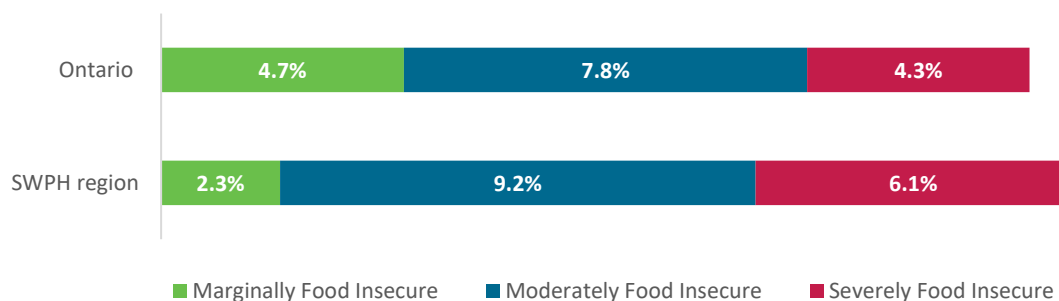
Ontario Marginalization Index

The Ontario Marginalization Index (ON-Marg) is a tool that combines demographic indicators from the census to show differences in marginalization by geography. Eighteen indicators from the census are grouped into 4 categories (referred to as dimensions), representing different aspects of marginalization.[9,10] These 4 categories, or dimensions, are called:

- Material resources
- Racialized and newcomer populations
- Age and labour force
- Households and dwellings

Dissemination areas (DAs) are small geographic units with a population of 400-700 people. There are 317 DAs in the SWPH region. Within each dimension, the ON-Marg tool ranks all of the DAs in Ontario and sorts them into quintiles (5 equal groups). This means that SWPH ON-Marg maps compare marginalization locally to all of the other regions across the province.

Material Resources

This dimension is closely linked to poverty and refers to the inability to afford or access basic material needs related to housing, food, clothing and education. In the SWPH region, 1 in 4 DAs are in the most deprived quintile in 2021, similar to 2016. The most deprived areas in SWPH tend to be in the Southeast and in urban centres (Figure 12 and Figure 13).

Figure 12. Ontario Marginalization Index Map of Material Resources, SWPH Region, 2021
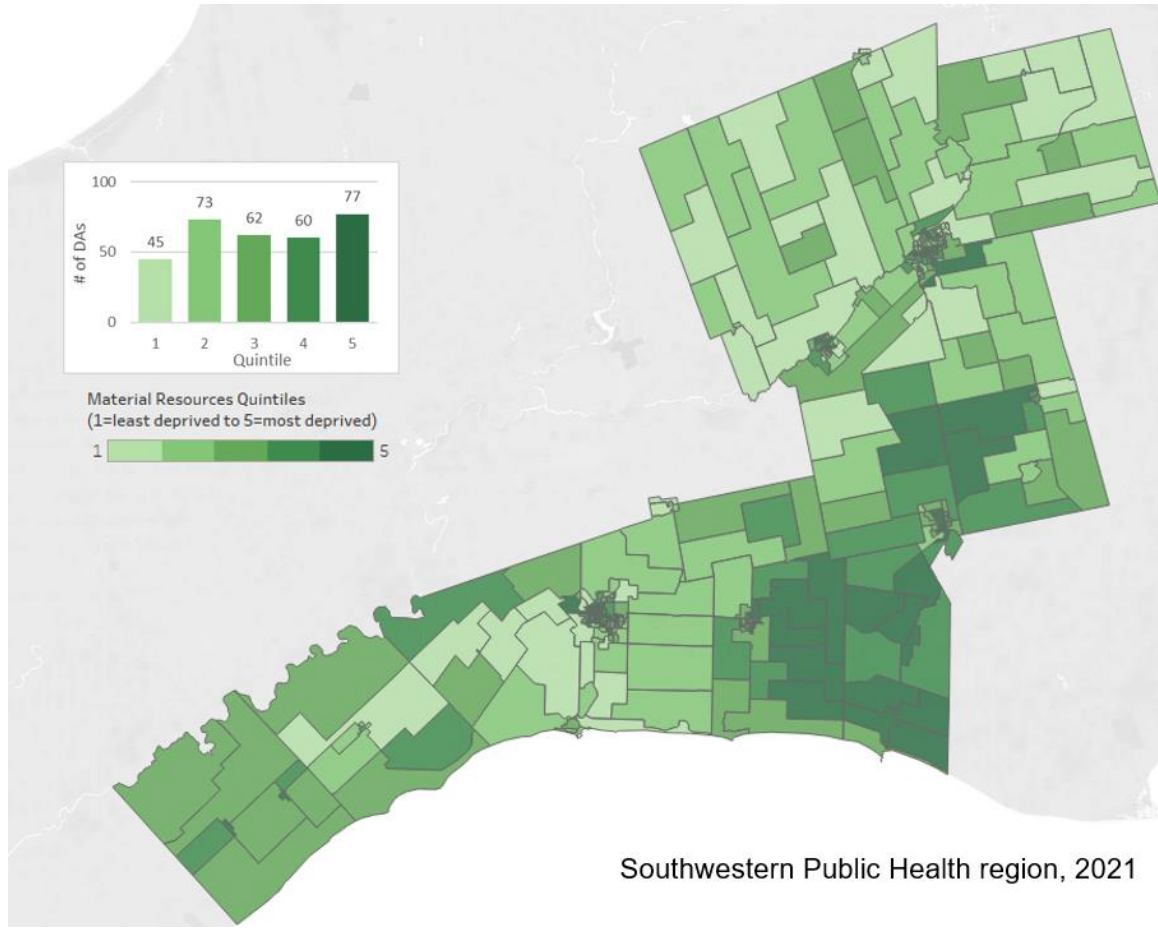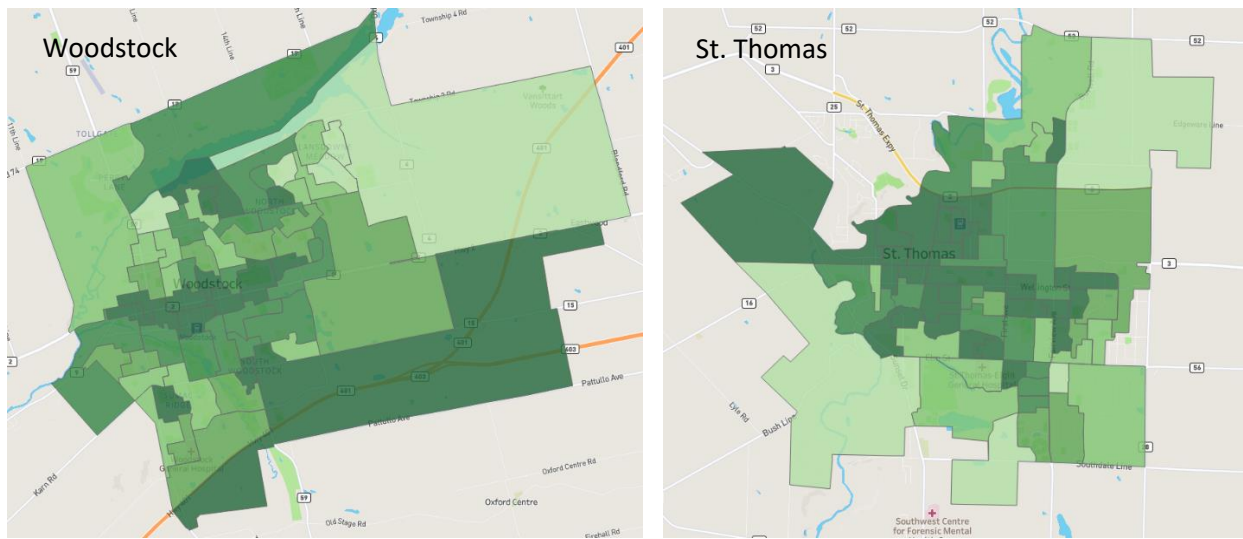

Figure 13. Ontario Marginalization Index Map of Material Resources, Woodstock and St. Thomas, 2021

Racialized and Newcomer Populations

This dimension measures the proportion of recent immigrants and/or visible minorities. These communities may experience high levels of racialization and prejudice. Compared to other parts of Ontario, the SWPH region has a very low concentration of racialized and newcomer populations, with only 1 DA in Woodstock in the most concentrated quintile (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Ontario Marginalization Index Map of Racialized and Newcomer Populations, SWPH Region, 2021
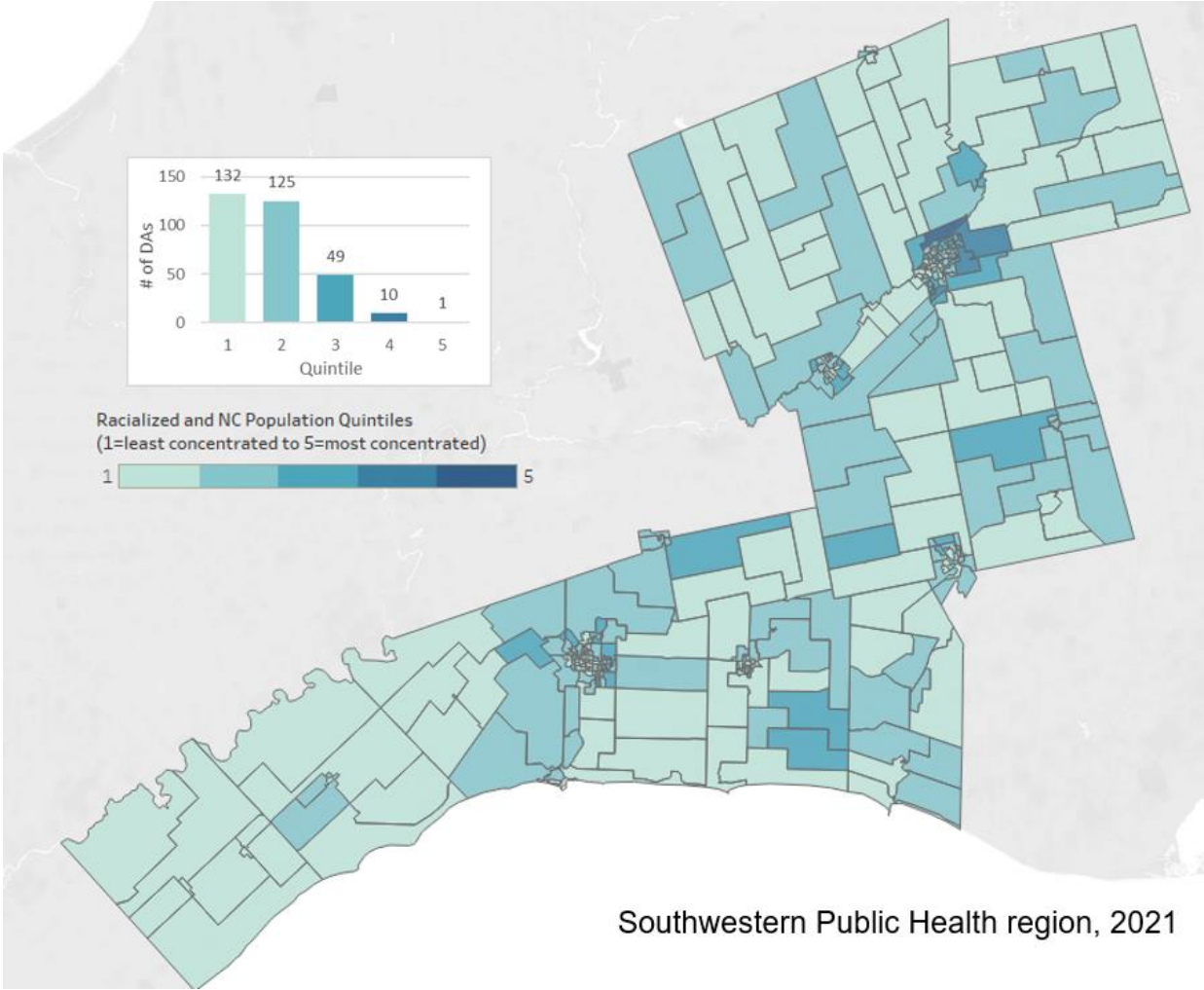
Age and Labour Force

This dimension measures the proportion of people who may require more financial and service support because they do not have income from employment. This includes older adults, children, and those unable to work due to disability. There are pockets of dependency throughout the SWPH region (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Ontario Marginalization Index Map of Age and Labour Force, SWPH Region, 2021
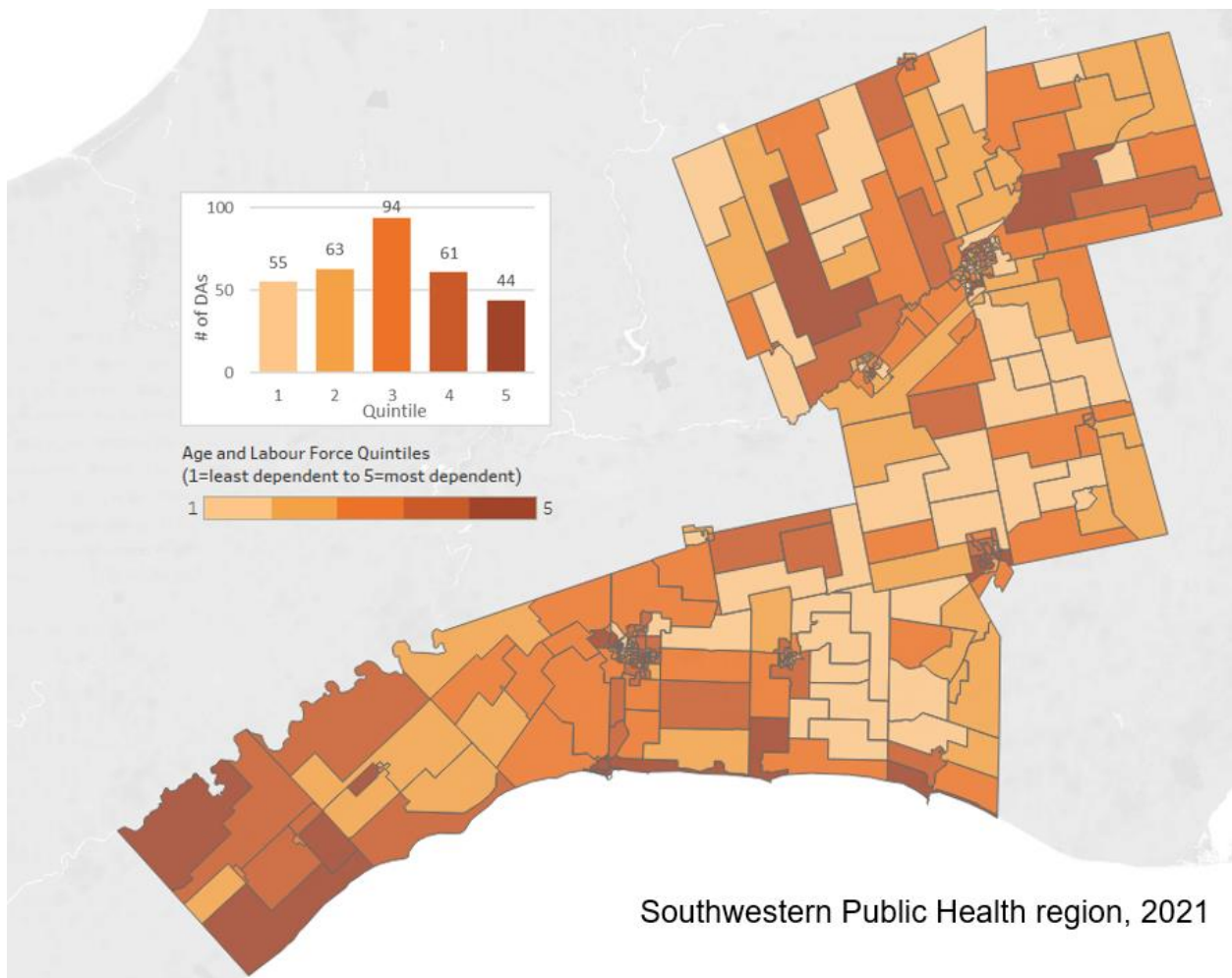
Households and Dwellings

This dimension relates to family and neighbourhood stability and is based on measures of housing, age and marital status to identify areas with more people who do not own houses, who move frequently and who live alone. High residential instability is concentrated in urban areas in the SWPH region (Figure 16 and Figure 17).

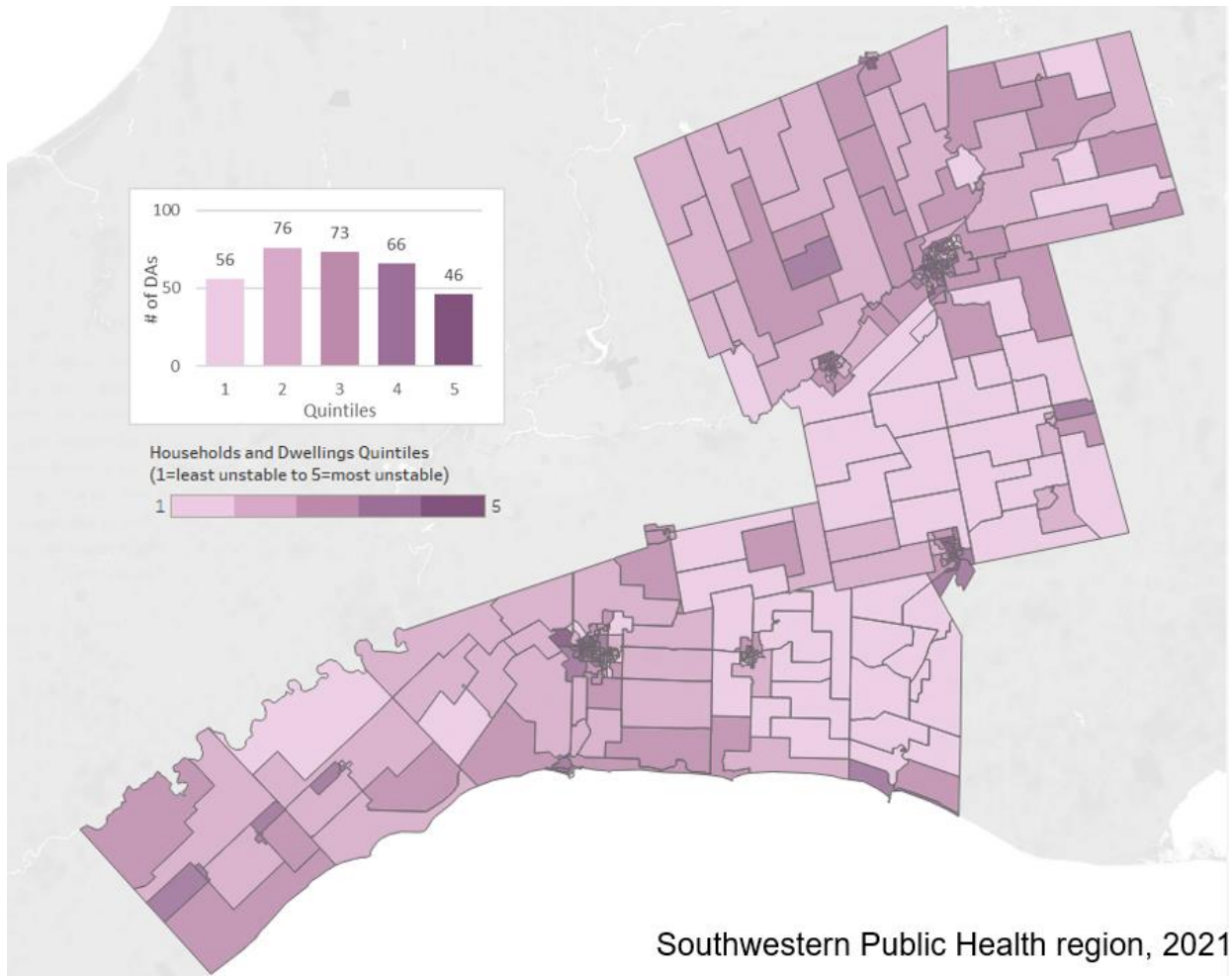*Figure 16. Ontario Marginalization Index Map of Households and Dwellings, SWPH Region, 2021*

Figure 17. Ontario Marginalization Index Map of Households and Dwellings, Woodstock and St. Thomas, 2021
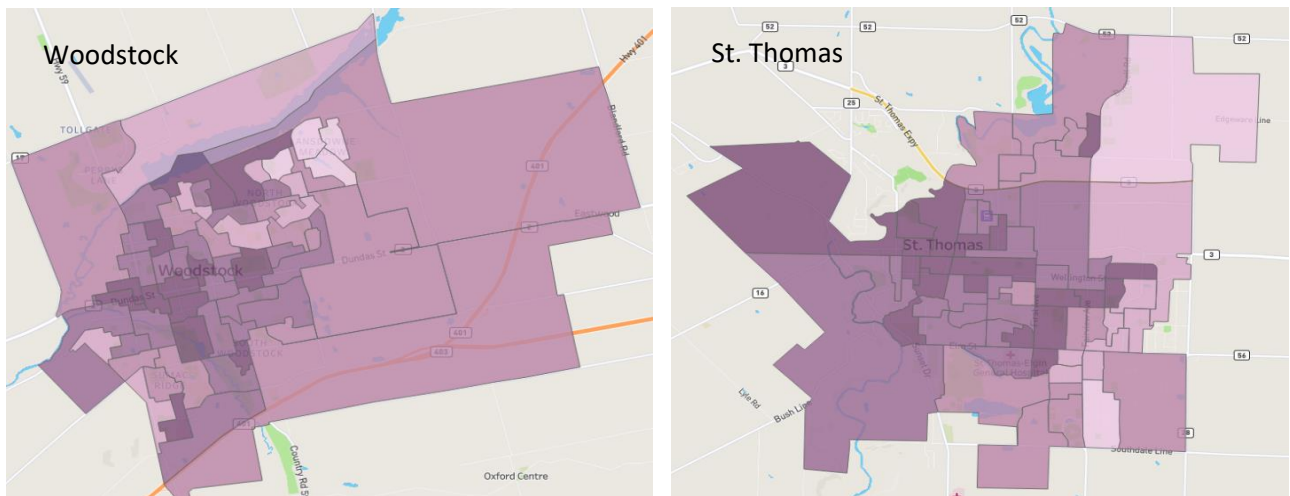
Conclusion

The population in the Southwestern Public Health region is changing. Not only is it important for organizations that serve the public to understand *how* the population is changing but it is also critical that these changes inform the development and delivery of programs and services. Understanding the characteristics of the population of Oxford County, Elgin County and the City of St. Thomas will help work towards the goal of improving population health and ensuring equitable access to programs and services.

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Appendix A

Age Groups by Municipality in the Southwestern Public Health Region, 2021

Municipality	Pop'n Count 0 - 19 years	Pop'n Count 20 - 64 years	Pop'n Count 65 years +	% 0 - 19 years	% 20 - 64 years	% 65 years +
Aylmer	2,020	4,130	1,550	26.2%	53.6%	20.1%
Bayham	2,410	3,640	1,060	33.9%	51.2%	14.9%
Blandford-Blenheim	1,775	4,465	1,315	23.5%	59.1%	17.4%
Central Elgin	2,735	7,850	3,155	19.9%	57.1%	23.0%
Dutton/Dunwich	935	2,390	825	22.5%	57.6%	19.9%
East Zorra-Tavistock	1,800	4,440	1,600	23.0%	56.6%	20.4%
Ingersoll	3,275	8,080	2,340	23.9%	59.0%	17.1%
Malahide	2,850	5,015	1,450	30.6%	53.8%	15.6%
Norwich	3,445	5,990	1,720	30.9%	53.7%	15.4%
South-West Oxford	2,135	4,180	1,260	28.2%	55.2%	16.6%
Southwold	1,185	2,710	950	24.5%	55.9%	19.6%
St. Thomas	9,530	24,200	9,115	22.2%	56.5%	21.3%
Tillsonburg	3,595	9,575	5,450	19.3%	51.4%	29.3%
West Elgin	990	2,840	1,225	19.6%	56.2%	24.2%
Woodstock	10,720	26,840	9,150	23.0%	57.5%	19.6%
Zorra	2,160	4,905	1,560	25.0%	56.9%	18.1%

Appendix B

Low-Income Measure After Tax (LIM-AT) Thresholds [11,12]

Household Size	Household After-tax Income, 2020	Household After-tax Income, 2015
1 person	$26,503	$22,133
2 persons	$37,480	$31,301
3 persons	$45,904	$38,335
4 persons	$53,005	$44,266
5 persons	$59,261	$49,491
6 persons	$64,918	$54,215
7 persons	$70,119	$58,558