



Guide to Health Neighbourhoods: Project Background

Durham Region Health Department

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General Background

Health Neighbourhoods

Health Neighbourhoods uses local data to improve the health and well-being of all residents.

The Health Neighbourhoods initiative provides a picture of how health varies by where we live and examines socio-demographic, health behaviour, and health outcome data for 50 Health Neighbourhoods in Durham Region. The boundaries of the 50 Health Neighbourhoods are shown in **Figure 1**.

The ultimate goal of the project is to use neighbourhood-level data to support strong, safe and equitable neighbourhoods that improve the health and well-being of all residents through evidence-informed decision making.

Health Neighbourhoods data are valuable assets to community partners.

Health Neighbourhoods information is easily accessible and available to all community partners including school boards, municipalities, health care providers, health and family service agencies, social planning councils, and other Regional Departments, such as Social Services.

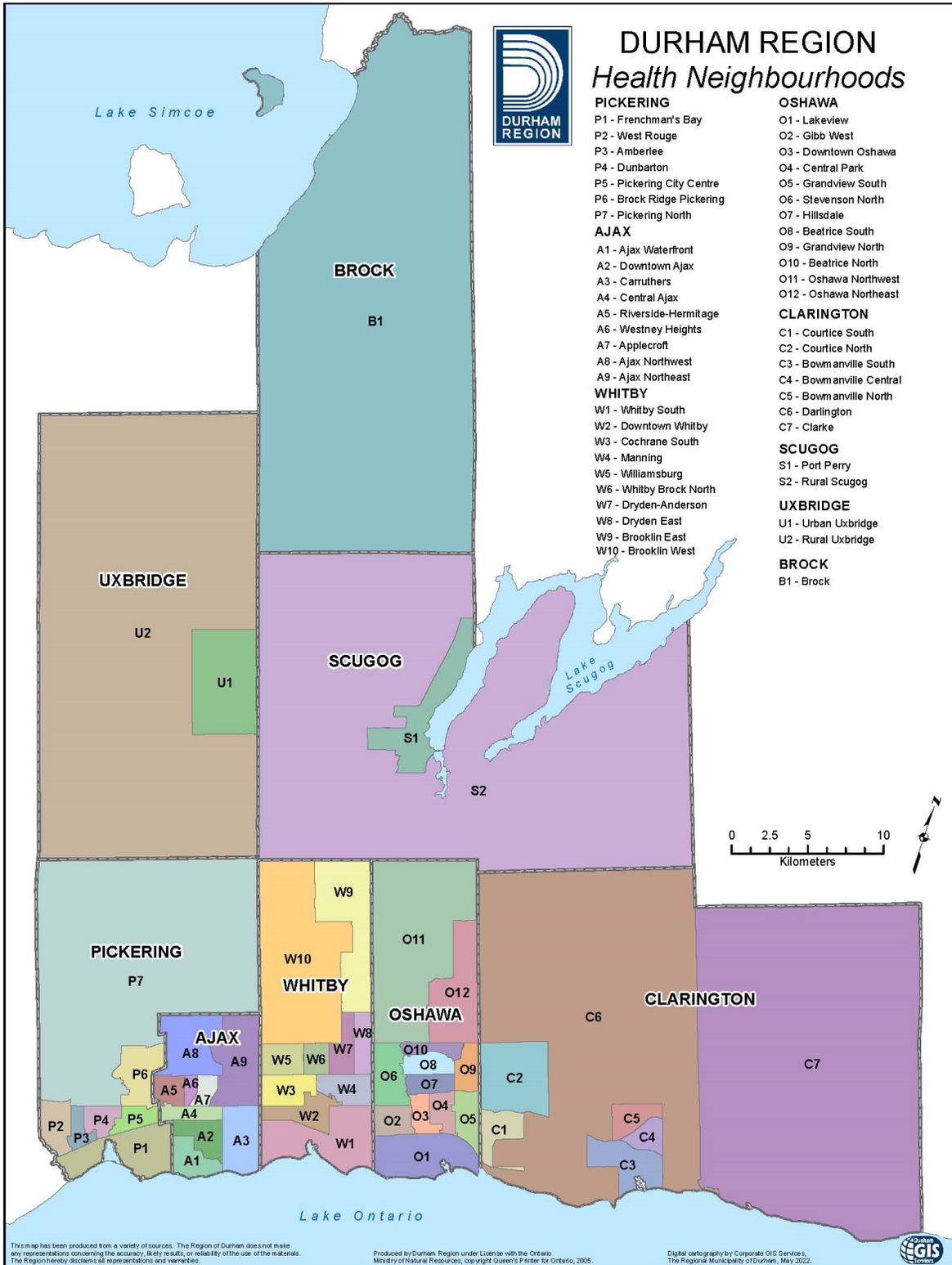
Health Neighbourhoods information does not prove causation but helps to understand patterns of health.

Information about Neighbourhoods helps to understand patterns of health in communities. It does not prove causal factors—scientific literature does this much more effectively. However, information from the literature can be used together with Neighbourhoods information to help inform our understanding of the patterns we see in Durham Region.

The Neighbourhoods information helps to:

- Target programs and initiatives to areas of Durham Region that really need them
- Inform planning, research, and capacity building to improve health and support the reduction of health inequalities
- Provide rationale and statistics to support funding proposals
- Form a basis for communications to Durham Region residents
- Inspire dialogue about how health varies across Neighbourhoods
- Meet requirements for Public Health programs and services, as outlined by the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS)

Figure 1. Map of Durham Region's 50 Health Neighbourhoods



What Determines Health?

Our health and well-being are affected by more than lifestyle choices and having access to good medical care when are sick.

Our living conditions, including where we are born, grow, live, work, play, and age all play a role in our physical and mental health and well-being.* These determinants of health include a range of personal, social, economic, and environmental factors that determine the health status of an individual, community, or population.† The Public Health Agency of Canada has identified 12 key factors that influence health and well being.‡

Determinants of Health:

1. Income and social status
2. Employment and working conditions
3. Education and literacy
4. Childhood experiences
5. Physical environments
6. Social supports and coping skills
7. Healthy behaviours
8. Access to health services
9. Biology and genetic endowment
10. Gender
11. Culture
12. Race and racism

* Commission on Social Determinants of Health. (2008). Closing the gap in a generation: Health equity through action on the social determinants of health: Final report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-IER-CSDH-08.1>

† National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. (2013). Let's Talk Health Equity. Available at: [Health equity | National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health \(nccdh.ca\)](http://www.nccdh.ca)

‡ PHAC website, What Determines Health? Available at: [Social determinants of health and health inequalities - Canada.ca](http://www.phac.ca)

Social determinants of health refer to a specific group of factors within the determinants of health. These relate to an individual's place in society, such as income, education, or employment. Experiences of discrimination, racism and historical trauma are important social determinants of health for certain groups such as Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+ and Black Canadians.³

Health Inequalities

Although Durham Region residents are generally healthy, some residents are healthier and have more opportunities to lead a healthy life.

Differences in the health status of individuals are called **health inequalities** and can be due to genetics and lifestyle choices. However, the social determinants of health can also have an important influence on health. For example, individuals with higher incomes are often healthier than those with lower incomes.

Health inequalities that result from unfair or unjust systems and policies are referred to as **health inequity**. Health equity seeks to reduce these inequalities by helping to give everyone the same opportunities to be healthy, no matter who they are or where they live.

Health Neighbourhoods can help support the reduction of health inequalities through evidence-informed decision making to foster strong, safe, and equitable neighbourhoods that improve the health and well-being of all residents.

Health Neighbourhoods Development

Health Neighbourhoods was developed and produced by the Durham Region Health Department. The Health Department has collaborated with other departments within Durham Region, as well as many community partners, to expand the project and enable knowledge transfer in the community.

Creating the Boundaries

The Health Neighbourhood boundaries were developed with the intention of creating areas with a sufficient population size that health information could be presented accurately. On average, there are 13,000 people in each Neighbourhood although the 2016 population varies from 8,305 in Westney Heights, Ajax to 22,080 in Ajax Northeast. The Neighbourhoods are typically larger than what most would think of as a "neighbourhood", but this was necessary for reporting health statistics.

The Neighbourhood areas are groupings of adjacent Statistics Canada Dissemination Areas (DAs). DAs cover all areas of Canada and have populations of approximately 400 to 700 persons per DA, although areas of high population growth often have larger populations prior to being divided before a census. We grouped the Durham Region DAs within the eight municipalities into Neighbourhoods based on population size and demographic characteristics, such as income. Boundaries were physical barriers such as highways, major roads, railway lines, and rivers and creeks. [Table 1](#) lists the Health

Neighbourhoods and some key information about population size and the number of DAs.

Durham Region is diverse with a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. Durham Region has some very fast-growing communities, as well as some rural communities that cover large geographic areas but have relatively small populations with little growth. The Neighbourhoods show the diversity of Durham Region across a wide range of demographic and health characteristics

Naming Convention

Each of the Neighbourhoods has a common name and an identification code (ID) with a letter and number, e.g., Frenchman's Bay (P1). The letter in the ID corresponds to first letter of the municipality, i.e., Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, Oshawa, Clarington, Scugog, Uxbridge, Brock. We ordered the municipalities from west to east and started in the south and then moved to the north. The Neighbourhoods are similarly numbered within each municipality from west to east, and south to north. Thus, the first Neighbourhood in a municipality is in the southwest corner and the last Neighbourhood is in the northeast corner.

Table 1: List of Health Neighbourhoods with municipality, ID, 2016 population count, and number of Dissemination Areas (DAs)

#	Health Neighbourhood	Municipality	ID	2016 Population	Number of DAs
1	Frenchman's Bay	Pickering	P1	16,855	29
2	West Rouge	Pickering	P2	13,900	18
3	Amberlee	Pickering	P3	9,685	15
4	Dunbarton	Pickering	P4	13,450	23
5	Pickering City Centre	Pickering	P5	14,030	20
6	Brock Ridge Pickering	Pickering	P6	12,855	15
7	Pickering North	Pickering	P7	10,215	18
8	Ajax Waterfront	Ajax	A1	10,785	20
9	Downtown Ajax	Ajax	A2	11,225	19
10	Carruthers	Ajax	A3	13,670	14
11	Central Ajax	Ajax	A4	11,700	21
12	Riverside-Hermitage	Ajax	A5	12,310	17
13	Westney Heights	Ajax	A6	8,305	16
14	Applecroft	Ajax	A7	11,580	19
15	Ajax Northwest	Ajax	A8	17,520	27
16	Ajax Northeast	Ajax	A9	22,080	8
17	Whitby South	Whitby	W1	14,520	21
18	Downtown Whitby	Whitby	W2	15,720	26
19	Cochrane South	Whitby	W3	8,860	15
20	Manning	Whitby	W4	14,905	32
21	Williamsburg	Whitby	W5	9,450	10
22	Whitby Brock North	Whitby	W6	11,710	16
23	Dryden-Anderson	Whitby	W7	11,360	16
24	Dryden East	Whitby	W8	12,485	18
25	Brooklin East	Whitby	W9	13,190	14
26	Brooklin West	Whitby	W10	14,585	15
27	Lakeview	Oshawa	O1	18,115	33

#	Health Neighbourhood	Municipality	ID	2016 Population	Number of DAs
28	Gibb West	Oshawa	O2	11,355	22
29	Downtown Oshawa	Oshawa	O3	10,770	22
30	Central Park	Oshawa	O4	11,090	24
31	Grandview South	Oshawa	O5	11,110	21
32	Stevenson North	Oshawa	O6	16,170	32
33	Hillsdale	Oshawa	O7	10,755	19
34	Beatrice South	Oshawa	O8	12,765	24
35	Grandview North	Oshawa	O9	12,665	16
36	Beatrice North	Oshawa	O10	10,550	10
37	Oshawa Northwest	Oshawa	O11	13,350	15
38	Oshawa Northeast	Oshawa	O12	18,930	13
39	Courtice South	Clarington	C1	16,635	19
40	Courtice North	Clarington	C2	10,795	16
41	Bowmanville South	Clarington	C3	15,035	23
42	Bowmanville Central	Clarington	C4	8,955	16
43	Bowmanville North	Clarington	C5	12,815	10
44	Darlington	Clarington	C6	11,180	19
45	Clarke	Clarington	C7	15,770	26
46	Port Perry	Scugog	S1	9,025	15
47	Rural Scugog	Scugog	S2	12,365	23
48	Urban Uxbridge	Uxbridge	U1	12,340	13
49	Rural Uxbridge	Uxbridge	U2	8,635	16
50	Brock	Brock	B1	11,355	24

Selecting Priority Neighbourhoods

Seven Health Neighbourhoods have been examined and identified by Durham Region Health Department as communities that require focus to build on health and well-being.

The intention of identifying these Priority Neighbourhoods was to spark a dialogue to create positive action. Building on partnerships and working collaboratively with the people in these communities could be the driving force for change.

How were the priority neighbourhoods selected?

Priority Neighbourhoods were selected primarily based on income measures as income is an important determinant of health.

Our health and well-being are affected by our living conditions. Income is an important determinant of health—people with higher incomes tend to have better physical and mental health than those with lower incomes. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to experience a variety of health problems across their lifespan. While living in low income is not a guarantee of less favourable health outcomes, inequitable access to the determinants of health at the individual, family and community level increases the risk for poor health outcomes.

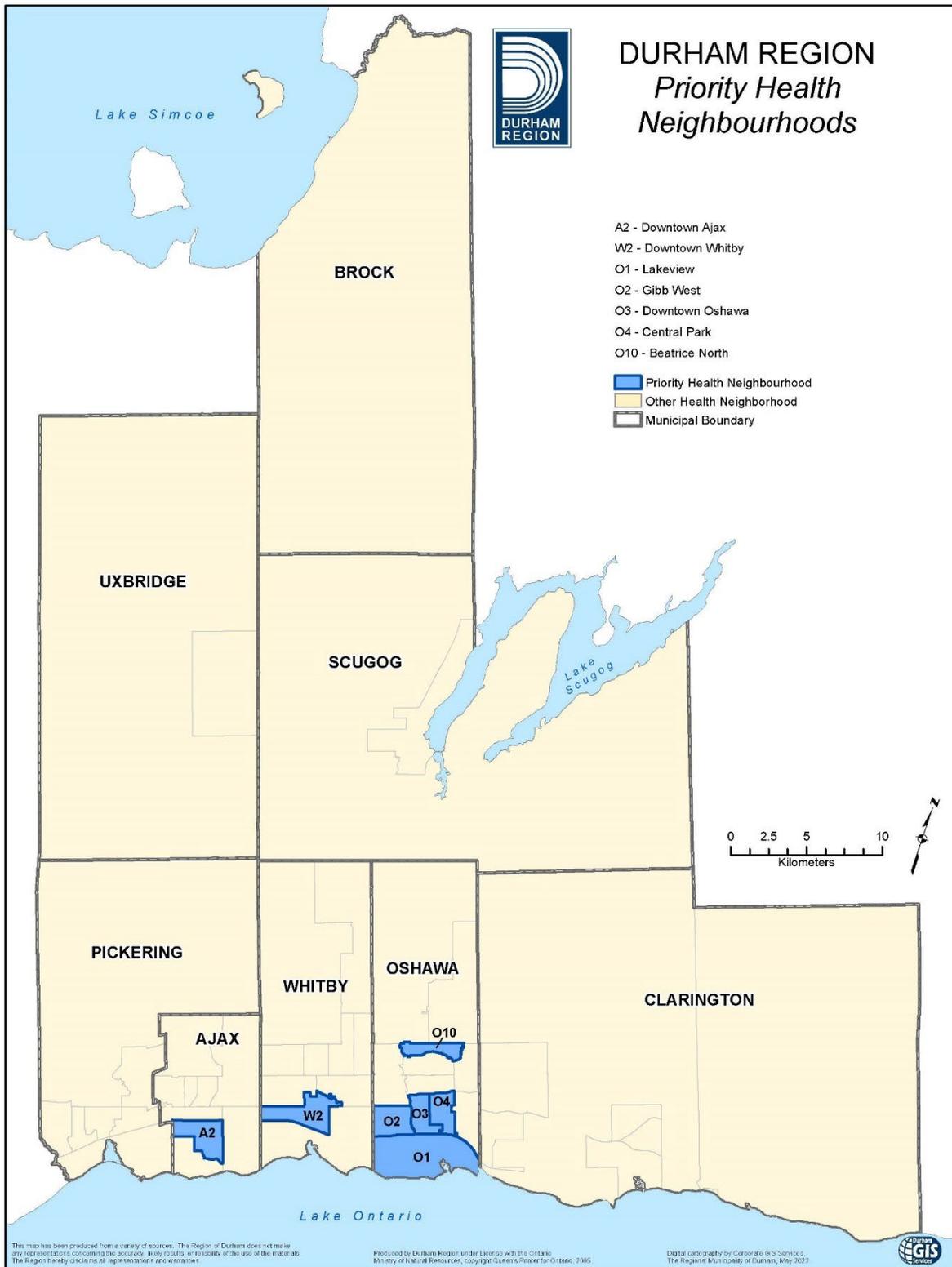
The seven Priority Neighbourhoods are:

1. **Downtown Ajax – Ajax**
2. **Downtown Whitby – Whitby**
3. **Lakeview – Oshawa**
4. **Gibb West – Oshawa**
5. **Downtown Oshawa – Oshawa**
6. **Central Park – Oshawa**
7. **Beatrice North – Oshawa**

The location of these Neighbourhoods is shown on the map below in **Figure 2**. These Neighbourhoods were chosen in 2015 because they had the lowest income levels based on median after-tax household income and the highest rate of low income in children less than 6 years of age. They also rank poorly in terms of overall low-income rate, low education levels, and unemployment, compared to the other 43 Neighbourhoods. Finally, these Neighbourhoods have many health challenges and make up approximately 15 per cent of Durham Region's population.

Although the Priority Neighbourhoods have the lowest income levels of the 50 Health Neighbourhoods, they also have many possible attributes, community assets, resources, and strengths. Understanding communities from a strength base can help the community build on what is working well and develop solutions for improvement.

Figure 2. Map of the 7 Priority Neighbourhoods in Durham Region



Health Neighbourhood Releases

Health Neighbourhoods is a constantly evolving project which continues to expand and improve:

- Initial Release – January 2015, 62 indicators
- Release 2 – February 2016, 82 indicators
- Release 3 – December 2017, 89 indicators
- Release 4 – June 2022, 96 indicators

What's new in Release 4

Health Neighbourhoods Release 4 was launched in June 2022 and involved the most change of any release to date.

This release included the following major updates in the way Neighbourhoods data are presented:

- New map viewer platform
- Online dashboards for data visualization replaced the PDF indicator summaries and Neighbourhood profiles used in earlier versions
- Neighbourhood's data can also be downloaded from the online dashboards

This release also included many indicator updates, including:

- 20 new indicators
 - 3 – Child health
 - 8 – General health
 - 4 – Health behaviours & risks
 - 5 – Socio-demographics
- 48 indicators were updated with two time-point comparisons
- 6 school readiness indicators were updated with three time-point comparisons
- 10 indicators were modified or re-named
- All socio-demographic indicators were updated with 2016 census data

Using Health Neighbourhoods Information

Health Neighbourhoods information is readily available in a variety of formats to the Health Department as well as all community partners, such as school boards, municipalities, health care providers, health and family service agencies, social planning councils, and other Regional Departments, such as Social Services.

Health Neighbourhoods Products

The information is available at the Region of Durham website at durham.ca/neighbourhoods, which provides access to reports, the Map Viewer, frequently asked questions, and interactive dashboards to explore indicator summaries and neighbourhood profiles.

The Region of Durham, GIS Services in Corporate Services – Information Technology, created the Map Viewer and interactive dashboards in-house.

Map Viewer

The Map Viewer allows users to zoom in to specific Neighbourhoods and view roads and various **Points of Interest**, such as schools and recreational facilities. The **Socio-Demographics, General Health, Child Health, and Health Behaviours & Risks** tabs provide access to maps on specific indicators.

Indicator Summaries

All Health Neighbourhood indicators are included in the indicator summaries dashboard. Each summary consists of information about the indicator definition, data source(s), impact on health, and methodological notes of concern.

Each indicator summary also presents the following information:

- Indicator map by Health Neighbourhood
- Ordered Neighbourhood comparison summary graph
- Summary table by Neighbourhood
- Summary table by Municipality
- When possible, a comparison to Ontario

The Neighbourhoods shown on the dashboard can be filtered by the following:

- Priority Neighbourhoods
- Higher than Durham Region
- Lower than Durham Region

The indicator data can also be downloaded by clicking on the “Download Data” button.

Neighbourhood Profiles

The Neighbourhood Profiles interactive dashboard presents information for each Health Neighbourhood, as well as municipality and for Durham Region as a whole. Each profile provides a description of the area, map that shows the boundaries of the Neighbourhood, and summary stats at a glance (population, population growth, number of live births, percentage of seniors, percentage foreign-born, and median income after tax).

The profile includes a table for all indicators compared to Durham Region, and Ontario when available. By default, all available years of data are shown on the profile, but this can be filtered to only show the most recent estimates, by clicking on the “Most Recent Data” box. The profile data can be downloaded by clicking on the “Download Data”.

Evidence-Informed Decision Making

The Health Department uses information from Health Neighbourhoods to improve programs and services for the residents of Durham Region. For example, we may focus smoking cessation programs in areas with higher smoking rates. Maps on breastfeeding duration can help us to better understand what is needed to support breastfeeding in our communities. The information is also widely used by our community partners.

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- Target programs and initiatives to areas of Durham Region that really need them
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- Provide rationale and statistics to support funding proposals
- Form a basis for communications to Durham Region residents
- Inspire dialogue about how health varies across Neighbourhoods

Health Neighbourhoods helps meet Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) requirements

Through surveillance, reporting and assessment of socioeconomic, health outcomes and behaviours, and the activities reported above, Health Neighbourhoods helps meet the following requirements for Public Health programs and services, as outlined by the OPHS:

- **Foundational Standard Requirements**
 - Public Health Assessment requirements 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6
 - Health Equity requirement 1
 - Effective Public Health Practice requirements 5, 6 and 7
- **Program Standard Requirements**
 - Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being requirement 1
 - Food Safety requirement 1b
 - Healthy Growth and Development requirement 1
 - Immunization requirement 2
 - Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control requirement 1b
 - School Health requirements 1 and 2
 - Substance Use and Injury Prevention requirement 1

Tables 2 to 5 (pages 17-29) provide lists of all Health Neighbourhoods indicators, by theme, and OPHS Requirements relevant to each indicator. More information on the OPHS can be found at the [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services and Accountability](#).