

COMMUNITY

SNAPSHOT

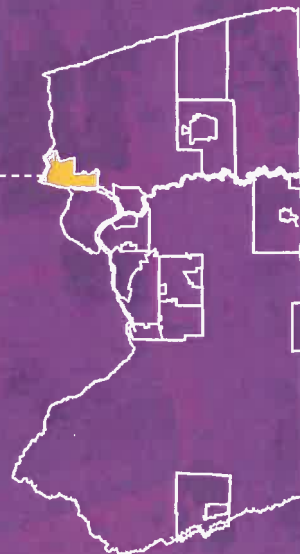
23,700+

live in or near poverty

CITY OF  
**Niagara Falls**

OCTOBER 2019

Since 2010, **poverty** increased **23%**, while the total **population** has decreased by **3%**.



**Numbers in Need**

IN BUFFALO NIAGARA



A Mobile Safety Net Team initiative established by The John R. Oishei Foundation



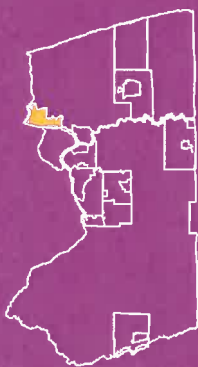
Prepared by



University at Buffalo  
Regional Institute  
School of Architecture and Planning

# City of Niagara Falls

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Numbers In Need is an initiative designed to strengthen the safety-net of human services in Buffalo Niagara communities that are most in need.

Visit [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org)

## About this Report

This report offers a snapshot of findings for the City of Niagara Falls, with new data on the community's population that lives in or near poverty. It includes the perspectives of human services providers, the landscape of providers, and strategies that could strengthen the safety-net for individuals and families.

Research in this report was led by the University at Buffalo Regional Institute in partnership with the Mobile Safety-Net Team. It was commissioned by The John R. Oishei Foundation. This work updates and expands upon a community report completed by the research team in 2014.

A Mobile Safety Net Team initiative established by The John R. Oishei Foundation



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## Defining Need

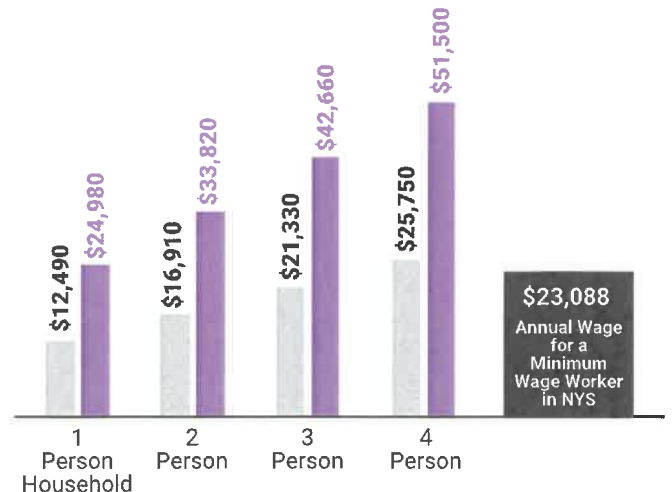
Over 23,700 residents in the City of Niagara Falls live in or near poverty with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty line.

The federal poverty line (FPL) is \$12,490 for a household of one, \$16,910 for a two-person household, \$21,330 for a family of three and \$25,750, for a family of four. A single parent of two who works full time, year round at the minimum wage in NYS (\$11.10 per hour or \$23,088 a year) earns an income just above the FPL in 2019.

The FPL is adjusted annually by the federal government and varies by household size. It is often used to determine eligibility for programs that assist individuals and families with basic living expenses such as food, utilities, and rental housing. Households with incomes that exceed two hundred percent of the FPL (up to \$51,500 for a family of four) generally do not meet income guidelines for most programs.

## Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2019

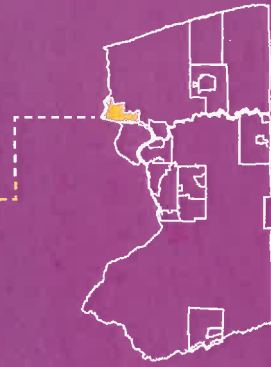
 Federal Poverty Level  200% of Federal Poverty Level



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## Reports for this Community

This report is part of a comprehensive suite of reports for the **City of Niagara Falls**, one of 12 representative communities in the Buffalo Niagara Region selected for assessment and investment as part of the Numbers in Need project.



Each of these reports for this community is available online at [NumbersInNeed.org](https://NumbersInNeed.org)



### Community Snapshot

This report, **Community Snapshot**, presents an overview of findings from the research in this community, with new data and information on the people living in or near poverty, their barriers to programs and services, the landscape of service providers, and strategies for strengthening the community so that all residents can thrive economically. This report draws from more detailed findings available on the Numbers in Need website, as well as from Insights from Residents and Insights from Providers. Agency and community leaders can use this report to understand key findings and identify topics for further exploring.



### Insights from Residents

**Insights from Residents** presents a more detailed look at the community's vulnerable populations, their needs, urgent concerns, and barriers to programs and services. A survey of residents and conversations with residents inform findings in this report. Agency and community leaders can use this document as they develop programs and services that respond to the needs of residents and remove barriers to jobs, programs and services faced by residents.



### Insights from Providers

**Insights from Providers** explores the perspectives of service providers in the community with respect to gaps in the landscape of services, barriers to reaching residents, promising developments, and strategies for strengthening the landscape of programs and services. A focus group with agency leaders informed the findings presented in this document. Agency and community leaders can use this report to shape programs and services that respond to identified gaps and barriers, while leveraging system strengths and promising developments.



### Visit us online at NumbersInNeed.org

**NumbersInNeed.org** is an online tool that leaders can use to understand economically vulnerable populations in the Buffalo Niagara Region, their urgent needs and concerns, barriers to services and factors that matter such as access to good paying jobs, educational attainment, and transportation options. The website features individual stories, community and regional indicators, interactive lists and maps of service providers, strategies for strengthening communities and models to consider.

## Population In or Near Poverty Across Niagara Falls

Population In or Near Poverty, 2017



Among the total population of 48,976

28% ARE IN POVERTY

**13,367**

live on incomes below the federal poverty level.



21% ARE NEAR POVERTY

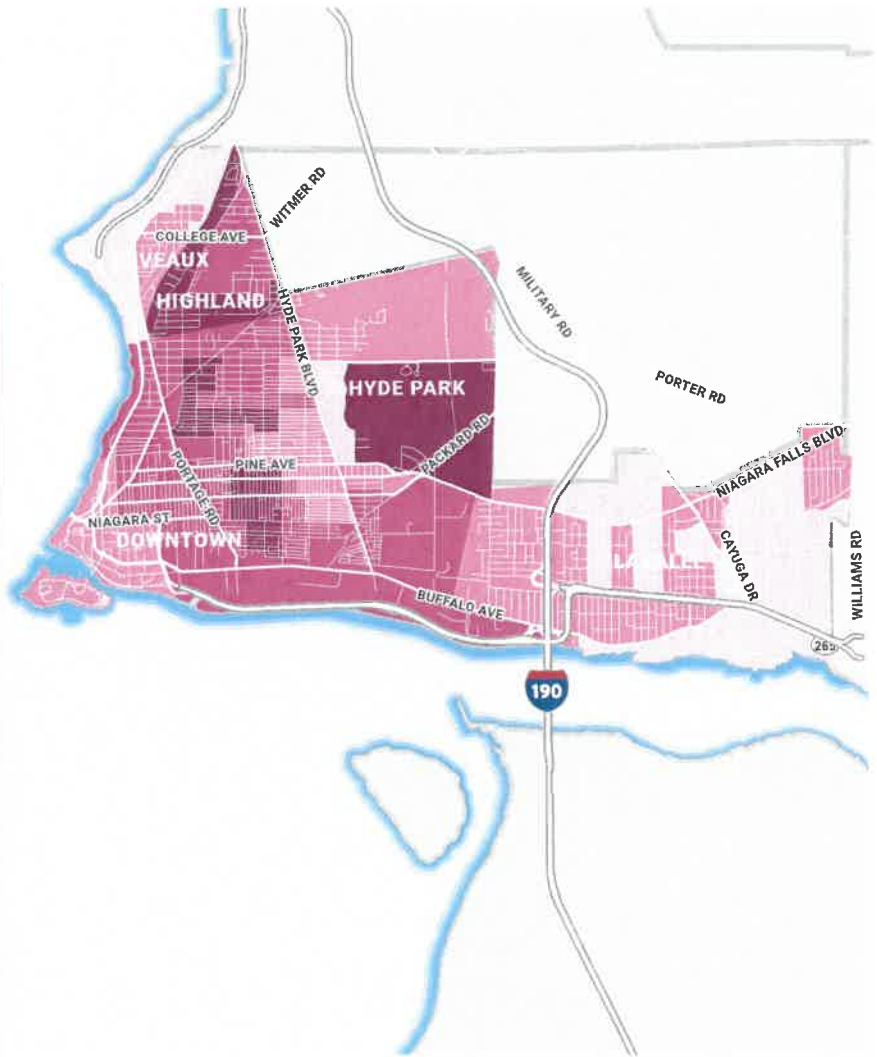
**10,351**

aren't in poverty but are close to it with incomes between 100%-200% of poverty.

49% ARE IN OR NEAR POVERTY

**23,718**

residents are doing poorly or struggling financially.



Source: American Community Survey, 2017, 5 year estimate

**Over 23,700 individuals—49% of the population—live in or near poverty in the City of Niagara Falls. In this community, about half of families live below the federal poverty line or near it, making ends meet on less than \$42,660 for a family of three.**

Residents most likely to experience poverty live along commercial corridors, near industrial areas, and in neighborhoods east of downtown. Some of the highest rates are in the Highland and Hyde Park neighborhoods and in the area between Pine Ave and Buffalo Ave just east of Portage Road. Trends over time show poverty growing in these areas over the past several years.

## Poverty, Need and Economic Vulnerability

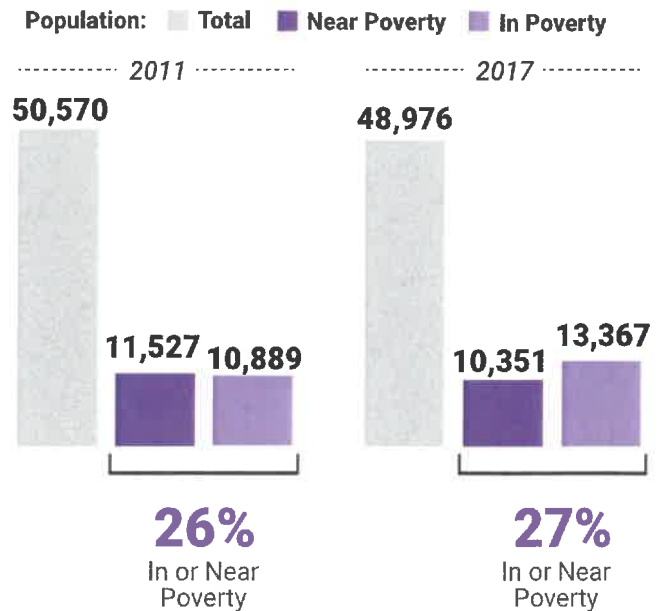
At a high level, the picture of poverty and economic vulnerability does not appear to be improving. The survey, focus groups, and analysis of background data show some things have improved in Niagara Falls; health insurance coverage among adults has increased, fewer respondents report barriers to services, and crime rates and juvenile arrests are declining. Nevertheless, the city continues to lose population, and the number and proportion of residents in or near poverty has increased since 2011.

**Today, more residents in Niagara Falls live in poverty than live with incomes between 100% and 200% of the poverty line.** Since 2011, the number of residents living *near* poverty dropped from 11,527 to 10,351, a decrease of 10%. During the same time period, the number of residents living *in* poverty increased 23%, from 10,899 to 13,367. **This trend suggests that some of those who were on the verge of poverty in 2011, with incomes near but above the poverty line, may have become worse-off in recent years and are now living below the poverty line.**

Among vulnerable populations in the city, some groups are faring better than others. Married couples with children and seniors over 75 have relatively low rates of poverty. However, children, single parents, young adults, and refugees & immigrants, all show signs of higher economic need.

**Almost half of the city's residents live in or near poverty. Niagara Falls' total population has declined, yet the number of residents facing poverty is increasing.**

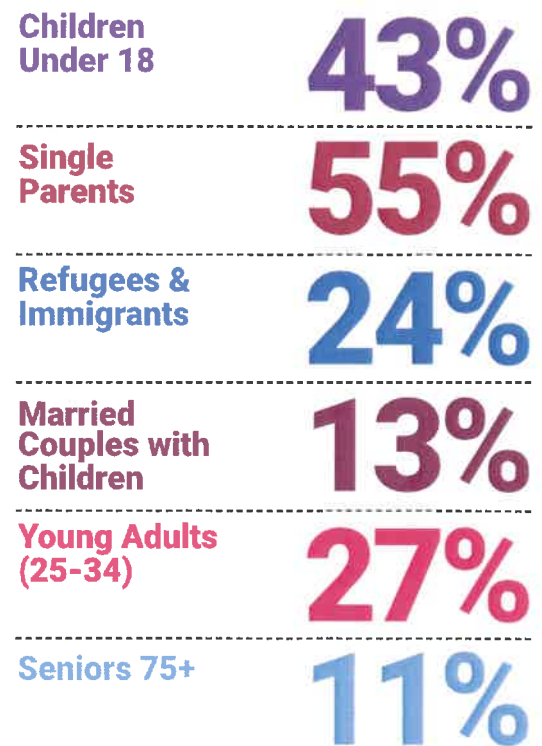
Total Population and Population In or Near Poverty, 2011 and 2017



Source: American Community Survey, 2007-11 5-Year Estimates; American Community Survey, 2013-17 5-Year Estimates

**More than half of single parents and 43% of children under 18 live in poverty. About a quarter of refugees & immigrants, and young adults live in poverty as well.**

Vulnerable Populations In Poverty, 2017



Source: American Community Survey, 2017, 5-Year Estimates.

## Factors That Matter

Economic vulnerability and poverty don't usually happen overnight; rather, they're the product of the interaction of economics, education, housing, transportation, safety, health, and other factors.

In Niagara Falls, six of the top employers are in tourism and retail. These industries are typically lower-paying and offer only part-time or seasonal jobs.

**About two-thirds of jobs in Niagara Falls pay less than \$40,000 per year.**

Achieving higher levels of education may be one way to earn higher wages for the 52% of adults in Niagara Falls with a high school diploma or less. Those with college degrees, especially graduate and professional, tend to make more than those with high school diplomas or less.

Getting to jobs can also be challenging for some; about one in five households doesn't have a car. Improving transportation alternatives could broaden job opportunities for those without vehicles.

Crime continues to be a challenge in Niagara Falls, but the data suggests the situation is improving. Violent and property crime rates are on the decline, although still relatively high compared to the other 11 communities. Juvenile arrests have also fallen in recent years.

## Community Data

Visit us online at [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org)

Explore more about this community and others in Buffalo Niagara through interactive features and stories.



### WORK AND INCOME

**Six of the top employers are tourism and retail related. Many jobs are lower-paying, part-time or seasonal.**

Top 10 Employers, 2019

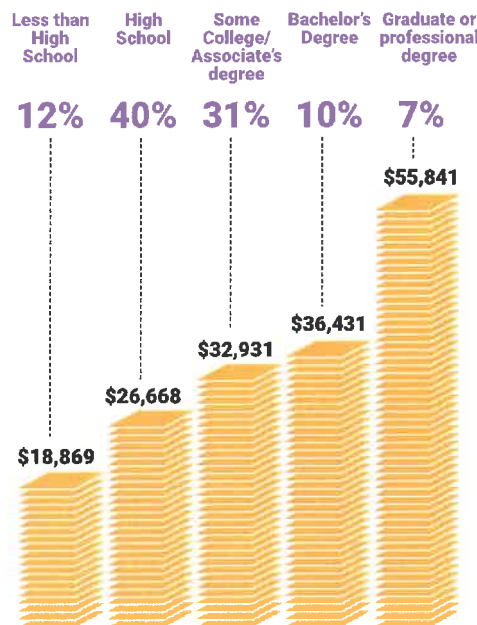
- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>#1</b> Seneca Gaming Corp.                | <b>#6</b> Walmart Supercenter         |
| <b>#2</b> Niagara Falls Memorial Med Center  | <b>#7</b> New York State Parks & Rec. |
| <b>#3</b> Niagara Falls City School District | <b>#8</b> Sheraton Niagara Falls      |
| <b>#4</b> City of Niagara                    | <b>#9</b> Occidental Chemical Corp    |
| <b>#5</b> Niagara County Social Services     | <b>#10</b> US Post Office             |

Source: InfoGroup, ReferenceUSA Business Database, 2019; Buffalo Business First, Book of Lists, 2018.

### EDUCATION

**More than half of adults in Niagara Falls have the potential to increase their earnings by pursuing education beyond high school.**

Educational Attainment and Median Earnings of Adults Age 25+, 2017



Source: American Community Survey, 2017, 5-Year Estimates.

### HOUSING

**Housing costs burden proportionally more renters than homeowners in Niagara Falls.**

% Lower-Income Households (earning less than \$35k/yr) that are Cost-Burdened, 2017



Source: American Community Survey, 2017, 5-Year Estimates.

### TRANSPORTATION

**Seniors are slightly more likely to be without a car.**

% of Residents Without a Vehicle

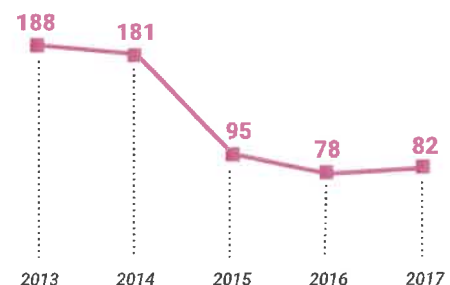


Source: American Community Survey, 2017, 5-Year Estimates.

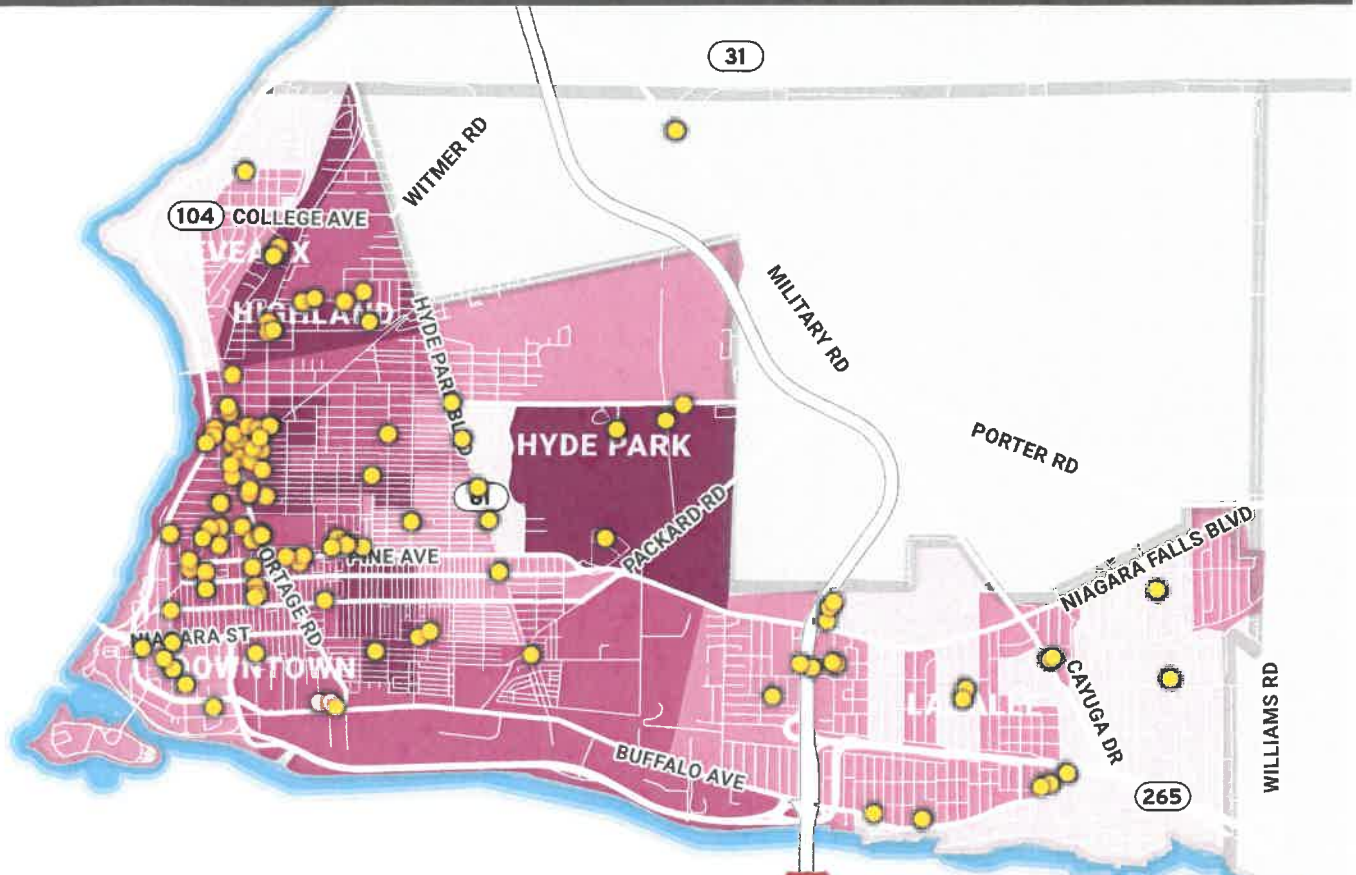
### CRIME

**Despite high poverty among youth, juvenile arrests fell by more than half since 2013.**

Juvenile Arrests, 2013-2017



Source: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Niagara County and Erie County, 2013-2017.



Population In or Near Poverty, 2017

- 0%-25%
- 26%-50%
- 51%-75%
- 76%-100%

● Providers

Source: American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2013-2017.

**Types of services provided, by %**

- 54% Information/Referral
- 49% Education/Training
- 42% Youth Programs
- 41% Health/Wellness
- 35% Mental Health/Addiction
- 33% Food
- 25% Financial Literacy
- 22% Clothing
- 22% Crime/Safety
- 15% Housing/Utility
- 13% Senior Programs
- 9% Homeless Services
- 9% Transportation
- 8% Teen Parent Programs
- 6% Veteran Services
- 4% Legal

**The Landscape of Providers**

**114** SERVICE PROVIDERS in the City of Niagara Falls



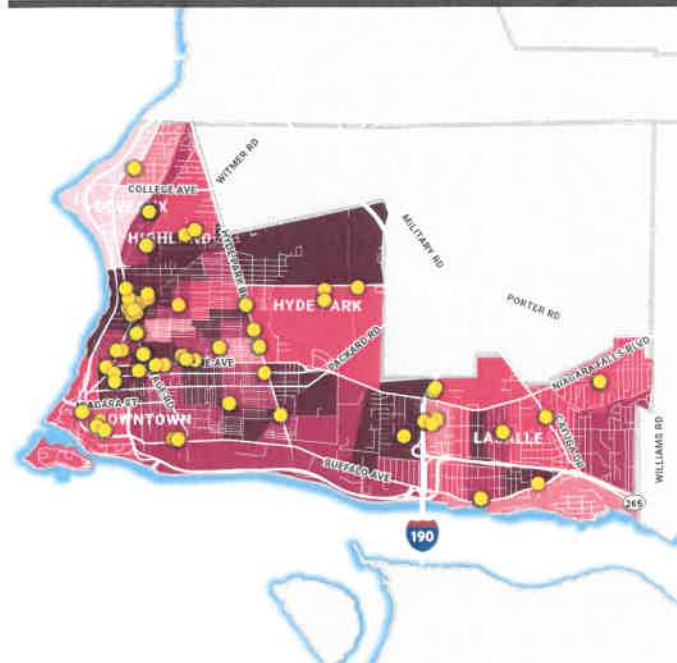
See more online

Visit [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org) to view additional maps and the listing of service providers.



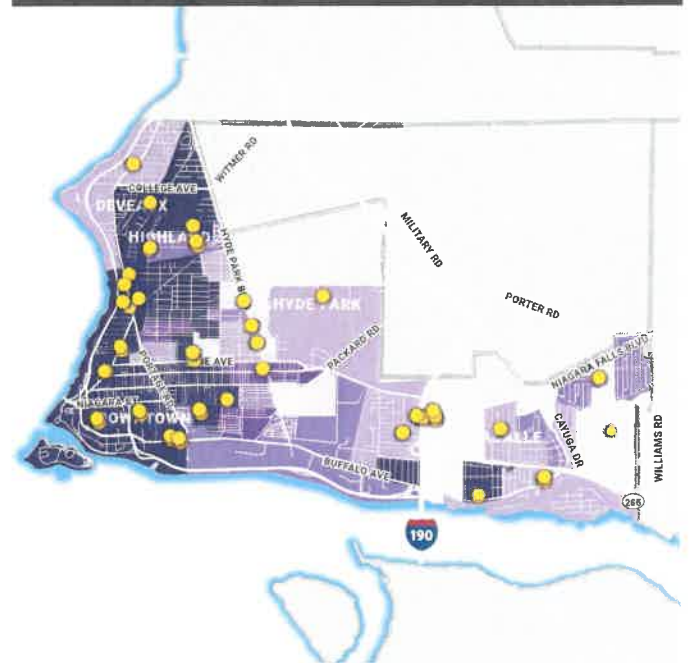
# Providers and Resident Needs

## % of Adults (25+) without a College Education



Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2013-2017.

## % Housing Units that are Vacant, 2017



Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 5-year estimates, 2013-2017.

### There are many training providers in Niagara Falls, but in some neighborhoods where the need for training is high, trainers are not as accessible.

In many neighborhoods of Niagara Falls, well over half of adults do not have a college education and could potentially benefit from additional education or training. Across the community, there are 56 service providers offering education and training services. Most of these training providers are located in high-need neighborhoods where more than half of adults do not have a college education. However, there are some high-need neighborhoods where few training providers exist, creating potential gaps in the landscape for residents that desire additional training. Gaps can be seen in parts of Hyde Park and LaSalle neighborhoods, and east of downtown between Buffalo Ave and Pine Ave. Local training providers can extend community outreach, transportation, and other support services to these areas making it easier for people to enroll in and advance through training programs.

### Some neighborhoods with a high number of vacant homes have fewer service providers dealing with issues tied to vacancy, like crime and homelessness.

High residential vacancy rates are often correlated with crime and homelessness. Neighborhoods in Niagara Falls have some of the highest vacancy rates in the region. The community has 31 organizations offering services for crime and homelessness, but these providers are often not found in neighborhoods with high vacancy. Most vacant units are in the darkest areas on the map in neighborhoods such as Downtown and Highland where 20%+ of housing units are vacant. But less than half of service providers for crime and homelessness are in these high-need areas. Providers can target outreach and other services to address safety and homelessness in neighborhoods where vacant homes are concentrated.



# Opportunities and Challenges for Providers

## Read more Insights from Providers

A detailed report exploring the perspectives from providers in this community.



## What's happened over the past 5 years?

There is increasing pressure on service providers in Niagara Falls, as poverty increased by double digits and the total population declined, with slightly fewer residents to support the city's tax base and service landscape through donations and volunteers. Providers see potential to do more with the resources that exist through new and expanded partnerships. They also see opportunities to improve services and outcomes through how services are delivered and the power of compassion in service delivery. Providers want to see greater alignment between what they are doing and regional economic development efforts so all residents can benefit from industry investments and growth. Transportation continues to be a barrier to work and services, but there are promising developments on the horizon that may improve options for public transit for workers.



← Available online at [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org)



## Strengths of the system

**114 providers exist in Niagara Falls.** There are at least four providers in each of 16 categories of programs and services.

Nearly half or more of providers offer **education and training, youth activities, health/wellness programs, and information and referrals.** Both residents and providers identified education and training as a programmatic strength.

**Most service providers are located in high-poverty neighborhoods** within one mile of thousands of individuals living in or near poverty.

In addition to being within walking distance of many residents, **nearly 90% of providers in Niagara Falls are within 1/4 mile of a bus stop** offering the foundation for strong public transit options.

## Gaps

Providers said that **compassionate service delivery is largely missing** and a gap in Niagara Falls, as it is across the region and beyond.

Providers reported that gaps also exist for **early intervention services for young children.** While services exist, demand exceeds supply. Long wait lists result in some children aging out and becoming ineligible for the services they need for school readiness.

Providers identified **substance abuse** programs as an additional need not captured by the preliminary findings. They described how addiction relates to many challenges such as disability, educational attainment and employment.

Providers described how gaps in **affordable, flexible childcare** create employment barriers for working adults.

## Barriers

Providers say that **human services delivery is not closely enough aligned with economic development** and this creates barriers that make it more difficult to train and prepare individuals living in poverty for higher-paying jobs.

Providers say that **lack of awareness by residents** is another barrier that makes it difficult to reach residents with helpful programs. **Sometimes residents have misperceptions and believe they are ineligible for services they qualify for.**

Providers say many residents they work with have not one barrier but **multiple barriers to work** including childcare, transportation, prior arrests, drug use and past due child support payments.

Providers identified **transportation** as being a major barrier for residents to access jobs and services.

## Promising Developments

**Compassionate Niagara** (an offshoot of the 2018 Niagara County Poverty Conference) promotes compassionate service delivery.

**The Homeless Alliance of WNY** notes that homelessness among veterans has been nearly eliminated.

**Niagara County Coalition for Services to the Homeless** is a community-wide coalition for tackling shared challenges.

**Niagara Falls Local Food Action Plan** offers a strategic plan for improving food access through healthy neighborhoods, education, agriculture and more.

**The Niagara Falls Bike Master plan** will create a more bicycle-friendly city.

**Heart, Love, & Soul** will launch a **Daybreak Program** with new services for homeless people.

**A BOCES Workforce Training Center** now offers vocational training in the city.

## Survey Results of Economically Vulnerable Residents

### 332 residents in need took the survey

Residents who took the survey provided a glimpse into the lives of the community's most vulnerable.

Many residents have urgent concerns related to a lack of money for basic necessities like food and utilities. Little cash for everyday expenses may contribute to residents taking on debt. In addition to consumer/credit card debt, residents are challenged with student loans and medical bills.

The majority of respondents have medical coverage, but almost two in five still have medical needs they can't afford, potentially contributing to outstanding medical bill debt.

Vulnerable residents often do not own a working vehicle, so many bike or walk to their destination, or rely on friends/family to get there. Those with cars often face expensive repairs and failed inspections.

### Read more Insights from Residents

A detailed report exploring the community's vulnerable populations, their needs, urgent concerns and barriers to support services.



# 40%

REPORTED HAVING SOME TYPE OF URGENT CONCERN

### TOP 3 URGENT CONCERNS REPORTED BY THESE RESIDENTS



### HEALTH CARE NEEDS

**39%** of vulnerable residents are in need of some type of healthcare but can't afford it.

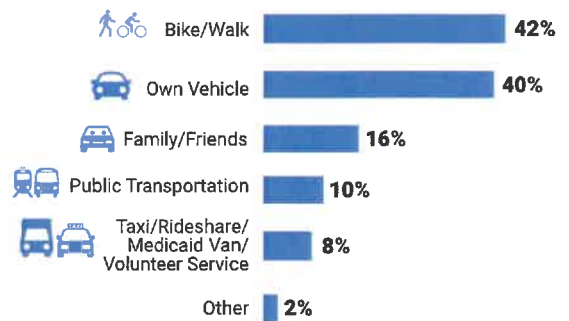
Although 87% of adult respondents have health insurance and this is an improvement from 2013, many have medical needs not covered by their insurance such as dental and optical care or prescription medicine. These services are often necessary but not affordable for low-income residents.



### TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

Survey respondents most commonly get around by biking or walking, although within that group, most people walk. Driving is the next most common method of transportation. **Only one in ten respondents uses public transportation, a percentage smaller than those who rely on friends and family, an indication that public transit may not be a viable or convenient option for many residents.**

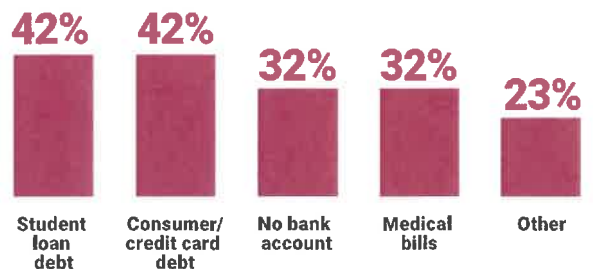
### How respondents get around



### FINANCIAL NEEDS

Half of all respondents are dealing with some kind of financial challenge. Debt is the most common problem they face. Over 40% have debt from student loans and/or consumer debt. Over 30% have medical bills. Many do not have a bank account, making saving for the future more difficult.

### Top 5 Financial Challenges in Household



## Regional Strategies and Models to Consider



Finding solutions to community challenges begins with laying out strategies for addressing their root causes. Strategies outline potential action steps for implementing. They also identify the kinds of organizations and agencies that could help carry out the implementation. Models to Consider from other places across the region, country, and world show how other communities have tackled similar strategies and achieved measures of success.

The following strategies and models are examples of all the possible solutions to Niagara Falls' challenges. **Please visit [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org) to view a more comprehensive collection of strategies and models that cover a broader range of topics.**

### See more online

Visit [NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org) to view a comprehensive collection of strategies and models that cover a broader range of topics.



### Workforce Development

## Enhance career pipelines for youth into good-paying jobs in the skilled trades that do not require a four-year college degree.

Nearly 25,000 young adults without children in Buffalo Niagara live in or near poverty. While 11% of them have dropped out of high school, an even higher percentage—36%—have a college education. Insights from residents suggest that a high school diploma alone does not equip youth with the skills needed to find good-paying jobs. Meanwhile, employers in industries like manufacturing and clean energy report hard-to-fill higher paying jobs in the trades, many of which require skills and training beyond high school but not a four year college degree. Training programs that prepare students for these types of jobs can lead young adults to rewarding careers.

### Potential Action Steps

Develop a career mentoring and internship program for teens through the local chamber of commerce or industry association.

Consider developing a YES (Youth Engaged in Service) program that offers teens out-of-school volunteer opportunities where they cultivate skills through service learning that may help with job identification later on.

Engage area employers in sponsoring in-classroom speakers, facility tours, internships, externships, and career mentors for students.

Raise awareness among students of the longer term, higher paying job opportunities and skilled training offered by unions and apprenticeship programs.

### Potential Actors in the Community

- Workforce development organizations
- Public school districts
- Community colleges
- BOCES
- Business community and industry organizations
- NYS Department of Labor and other government agencies
- Economic and community development organizations

### Models to Consider

BEGREEN P-TECH, Buffalo, NY  
[buffaloschools.org/Page/84607](http://buffaloschools.org/Page/84607)

Town of Amherst Youth Engaged in Service (YES), Amherst, NY  
[amherst.ny.us/pdf/youth/yes\\_bro.pdf](http://amherst.ny.us/pdf/youth/yes_bro.pdf)



## Regional Strategies and Models to Consider, cont'd.



### Transportation

## Improve the viability and safety of active modes of transportation—like walking and biking.

Active modes of transportation, like biking and walking, are low-cost, healthy travel options. However, the feasibility of these options is limited in many communities by environmental conditions, like inadequate sidewalks and street lighting, and dispersed locations of key services. Insights from providers show that neighborhoods that are not walkable or safe for pedestrians can limit residents' ability to access services. **Placing more jobs and services near populations in need is a straightforward way to increase accessibility and overcome transportation barriers.** Promoting environments that encourage physical activity, such as walkable neighborhoods, parks, and trails, can also encourage people to make more trips by walking or biking.

### Potential Action Steps

Locate service providers in existing communities, particularly in areas with a high concentration of populations in need, such as older adults, individuals living in or near poverty, or in households without a vehicle.

Promote volunteerism to foster healthy, active lifestyles, especially for older adults.

Engage residents through direct outreach to promote walking and physical activity.

Advocate for the placement of senior housing and other residential developments near existing amenities and services, such as shopping, health care, and food.

Host events, walks, and bike rides to promote the use of existing active transportation infrastructure.

Partner with health care providers, hospitals, and clinics to promote biking and walking.

### Potential Actors in the Community

NFTA

Private ride-sharing companies

Transportation service providers (private, not-for-profit)

Local governments

Economic and community development organizations

Health service providers

Community organizations and block clubs

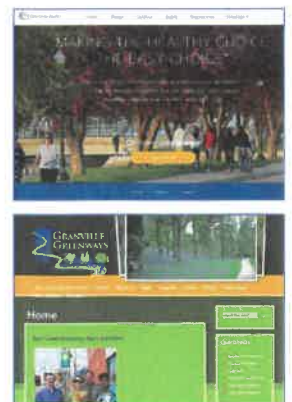
### Models to Consider

Albert Lea Blue Zones Program, Albert Lea, MN

[albertlea.bluezonesproject.com](http://albertlea.bluezonesproject.com)

Granville Greenways, Granville County, NC

[granvillegreenways.org](http://granvillegreenways.org)



# Data Sources & Notes

## Cover

US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

US Census Bureau, US Decennial Census, 2000.

## Defining Need, Page 2

Federal Poverty Level: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, HHS Poverty Guidelines for 2019.

Minimum Wage: New York State Department of Labor, Minimum Wage (effective 12/31/18).

## Poverty Map, Page 4

US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

## Poverty, Need and Economic Vulnerability, Page 5

Population in or Near Poverty: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2007-11 5-Year Estimates; US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-17 5-Year Estimates.

Vulnerable Populations: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

## Factors that Matter, Page 6

Work and Income: InfoGroup, ReferenceUSA Business Database, 2019; Buffalo Business First, Book of Lists, 2018. Top employers were first downloaded from ReferenceUSA and mapped to confirm location within the boundaries of the 12 communities. Top businesses by number of employees were cross-referenced with the Buffalo Business First Book of Lists (2018) to ensure accuracy in number of employees at the business location, when available.

Education: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017. All income by education numbers are

actual medians except those for graduate or professional degrees; these have been calculated by weighted averages of the medians, because combined medians were not available via Social Explorer.

Housing: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017. Low-income households in this instance are defined as households with incomes below \$35,000/year.

Transportation: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Crime: NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Niagara County and Erie County, 2013-2017.

In 2017, NYS passed Raise the Age legislation that deals with non-felony offenses committed by 16- and 17-year olds outside of the criminal justice system. The law went into effect for 16 year olds on October 1, 2018 and will be effective for 17 year olds on October 1, 2019. While this law did not affect the juvenile arrest data shown in this report, it may affect trends in future years, beginning in 2018.

## The Landscape of Providers, Page 7

Poverty Map: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Provider Data: Information submitted by agency providers through a provider questionnaire updated a listing of providers developed for the 2014 community report for the City of Niagara Falls. Providers provided information on program and service locations, agency location, geographic scope and more. Most service providers are not-for-profit and public sector providers.

Tax records available through the IRS and National Center for Charitable Statistics were used to identify new not-for-profits with locations in the community since 2014.

## Provider Services and Needs of Residents, Page 8

Poverty Map: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2017.

Provider Data: See note for page 6.

## Opportunities and Challenges for Providers, Page 9

Insights from Providers, City of Niagara Falls, October 2019. Provider insights come from an agency focus group held in July 2019 with 16 provider representatives.

## Survey Results of Economically Vulnerable Residents, Page 10

Insights from Residents, City of Niagara Falls, October 2019. Survey findings come from 332 surveys completed at 23 locations between April and August 2019.

## Strategies and Models to Consider

Educational attainment of young adults in Buffalo Niagara: IPUMS, American Community Survey, 2016 (5-year estimates).

# COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT City of Niagara Falls

OCTOBER 2019

## Numbers in Need

IN BUFFALO NIAGARA



A Mobile Safety Net Team  
initiative established by  
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Visit us online to  
learn more about  
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communities  
in need across  
Buffalo Niagara.



[NumbersInNeed.org](http://NumbersInNeed.org)