



CSWB

AYLMER-ELGIN-ST. THOMAS

Community Safety and Well-Being Plan



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Message from Mayor French, Warden Marks, and Mayor Preston



On behalf of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan Coordinating Committee, we are pleased to present the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-being (CSWB) Plan. The CSWB Plan is a roadmap for how partners across different sectors can work together to make our community a safer, more inclusive place where all residents thrive. This plan marks a shift in focus from a reactive, response-based approach to incidents to a more proactive, holistic approach to community safety.

With this plan, we will respond to the needs of our communities as we use local data to make evidence-informed decisions. We will develop and implement new strategies to address the complex issues facing our communities, and we will work with our community partners to rethink the way we deliver services. Many of our community partners are already doing excellent work to contribute to safety and well-being in Aylmer, Elgin and St. Thomas. The CSWB Plan recognizes that complex risks to safety and well-being cannot be addressed in isolation by any one organization, agency or sector. The goal of this Plan is to achieve greater coordination and collaboration on issues and situations before they escalate. It is important to continue to build and strengthen partnerships across sectors, and we thank our many community partners that have come together to develop this Plan.

This Plan will define community safety and well-being planning in Elgin and St. Thomas over the coming years, but it is not a final destination. Community safety and well-being issues will continue to evolve, and we are committed to ongoing engagement and dialogue to ensure that the Plan remains informed, relevant and reflective of evolving needs. We thank you for your feedback throughout the planning process, and we look forward to working with you all to make our communities safer, more inclusive places where all residents thrive.

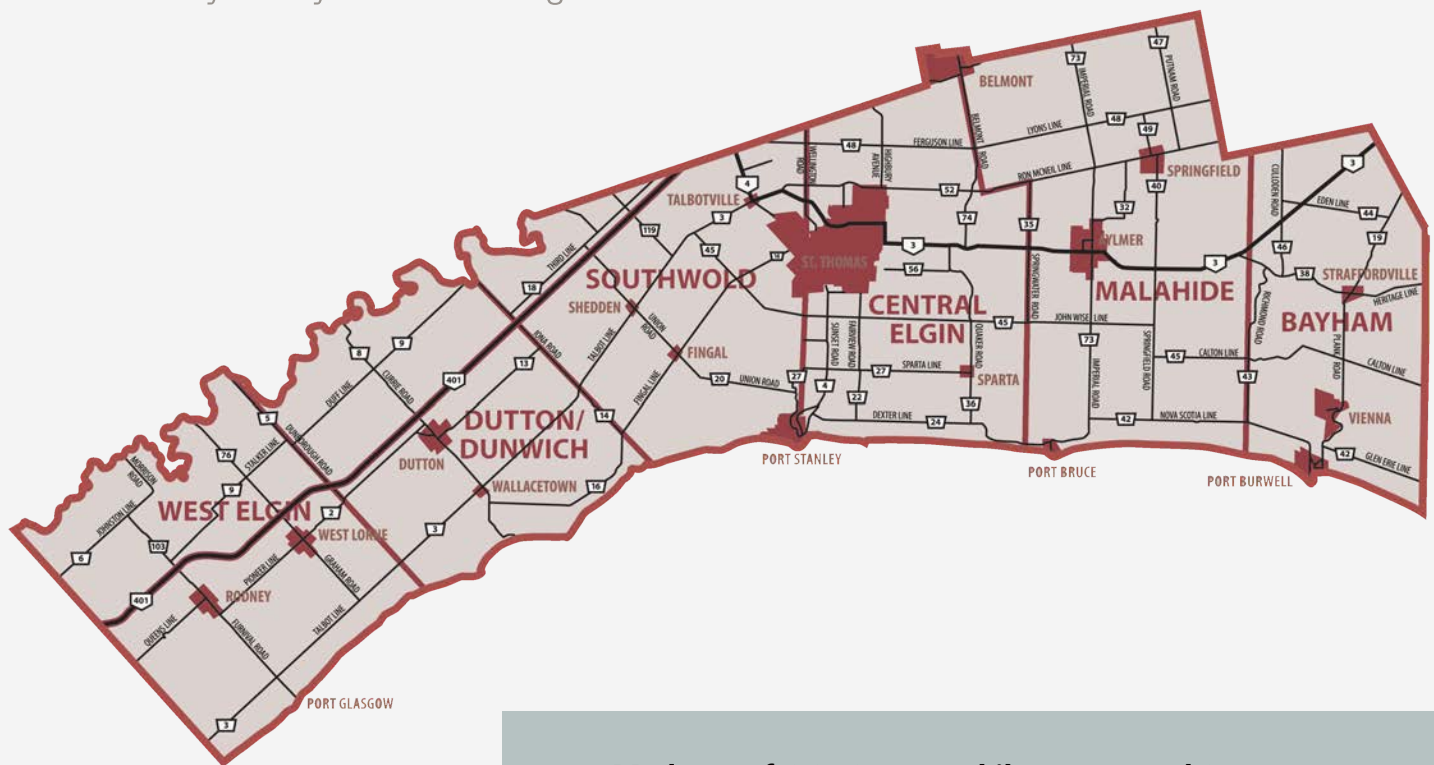
Mary French
Mayor, Town of Aylmer

Tom Marks
Warden, County of Elgin

Joe Preston
Mayor, City of St. Thomas

The Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Context

Community Safety and Well-Being Plan



Made up of 1,881 square kilometres and 8 towns, townships, municipalities and cities:

City of St. Thomas
Town of Aylmer
Municipality of Bayham
Municipality of Central Elgin

Municipality of Dutton-Dunwich
Township of Southwold
Township of Malahide
Municipality of West Elgin

**ELGIN COUNTY'S
POPULATION
AS OF 2016
88,978**

**52% OF THE
POPULATION LIVE
WITHIN THE SMALL TO
MEDIUM SIZED URBAN
MUNICIPALITIES OF
ST. THOMAS AND
AYLMER**

**MEDIAN AGE OF
THE POPULATION
IN ELGIN COUNTY
IS 42.5 YEARS**

**ALMOST 15% OF
RESIDENTS IN
BAYHAM AND
MALAHIDE REPORT
SPEAKING
GERMAN MOST
OFTEN AT HOME**

**21.4% OF
CHILDREN AGE 5
AND YOUNGER
LIVE IN LOW
INCOME
HOUSEHOLDS**

**65.5%
(POPULATION 15+)
TRAVEL OUTSIDE
OF THEIR
MUNICIPALITY
FOR WORK**

Community Safety and Well-Being Planning In Ontario: An Overview

In 2009, the work of community safety and well-being planning began in Ontario with a partnership between the Ministry of the Solicitor General and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. Community safety and well-being is broader than the traditional definition of safety (i.e. crime) and is critical to ensure that community members are safe, have a sense of belonging, have opportunities to participate, and are able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income, and social and cultural expression. Ensuring this sense of safety and well-being requires a multi-sector, collaborative effort.

The Police Services Act (1990) mandates every municipal council to prepare and adopt a Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan. Under the legislation, municipalities have the discretion and flexibility to develop joint plans with surrounding municipalities. The municipalities in Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas are working collaboratively to develop a shared Community Safety and Well-Being Plan for all of Elgin.

As part of the legislation, the Province has mandated a number of requirements. Municipalities must:

- Prepare and adopt a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan
- Work in partnership with a multi-sectoral advisory committee comprised of representation from the police service board and other local service providers in health/mental health, education, community/social services and children/youth services
- Conduct consultations with the advisory committee and members of the public

The Ontario Framework

The Ontario Community Safety and Well-Being Planning framework operated as a guide in developing the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. This framework focuses on collaboration, information sharing and performance measurement, and identifies four areas in which communities can be made safer and healthier:

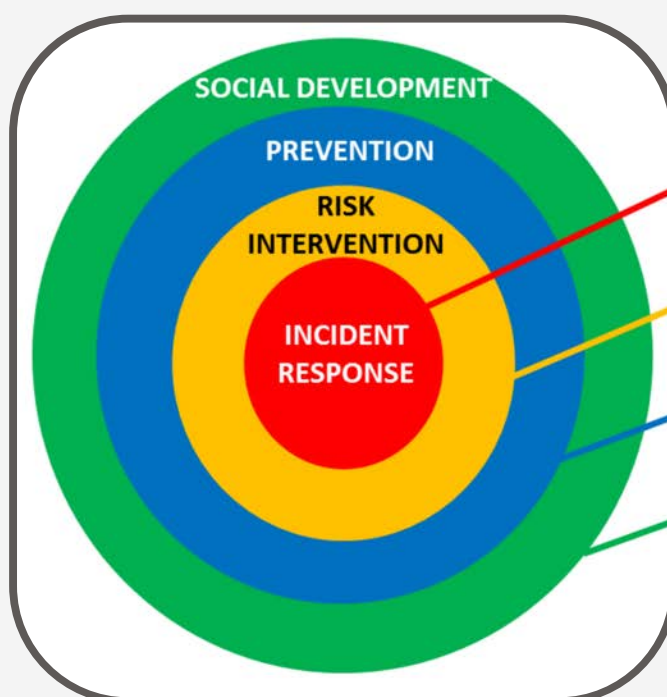
1. Social Development
2. Prevention
3. Risk Intervention
4. Incident Response

1. Social Development

Promoting and maintaining community safety and well-being by bringing together a wide range of sectors, agencies and organizations to address complex social issues, like poverty, from every angle.

2. Prevention

Proactively reducing identified risks by implementing measures, policies or programs to reduce priority risks before they result in crime, victimization or harm.



3. Risk Intervention

Mitigating situations of elevated risk by multiple sectors working together to address situations where there is an elevated risk of harm – stopping something bad from happening right before it is about to happen.

4. Incident Response

Critical and non-critical incident response, or what is traditionally thought of when referring to crime and safety, including service responses such as police, fire, emergency medical services, child welfare agencies removing a child from their home, a person being apprehended under the Mental Health Act, or a school principal expelling a student.

The individuals involved in the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas community safety and well-being planning process considered each of these four areas in terms of the data that was collected and the identification of the areas of focus for the plan.

Community Safety and Well-Being Planning In Ontario: An Overview

The Provincial planning framework for Community Safety and Well-Being Plans highlights a number of critical success factors of community safety and well-being planning. These include

Strength-Based – recognize the work that’s already being done in the community and collaborating to do more and leverage local expertise

Risk-Focused – focus on the risk, preventing something bad from happening rather than trying to fix it after the fact

Awareness and Understanding – everyone understands their role in making the community a safe and healthy place to live

Highest Level Commitment – to be successful, this initiative requires dedication and input from a wide range of sectors, agencies, organizations and groups

Effective Partnerships – due to the complex nature of community safety and well-being, no single individual, agency or organization can fully own the planning process

Evidence and Evaluation – part of the planning process must involve gathering information and evidence to provide a clear picture of what is happening in the community

Cultural Responsiveness – being open to and respectful of cultural difference



Our approach to developing the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, and the resulting three year plan is aligned with these critical success factors.

Our Approach

A Coordinating Committee was established to guide the overall process and development of the Aylmer–Elgin–St. Thomas Community Safety and Well–Being Plan. This committee was comprised of the following representatives:

- Mayor, City of St. Thomas
- Councillor, City of St. Thomas
- Councillor, Elgin County Council
- Councillor, Elgin County Council
- Police Chief, Town of Aylmer
- Police Chief, City of St. Thomas
- Inspector, Elgin OPP
- City Manager, City of St. Thomas
- Clerk, Town of Aylmer
- CAO, County of Elgin

A multi–sectoral Advisory Committee was also established to review the data and information that was collected and to identify potential areas of focus for the plan. Membership on the Advisory Committee was open to all individuals and organizations who were interested in participating in the planning process. The contact list for this committee encompassed 159 individuals and was comprised of a broad cross–section of organizations, with representatives from the following sectors:

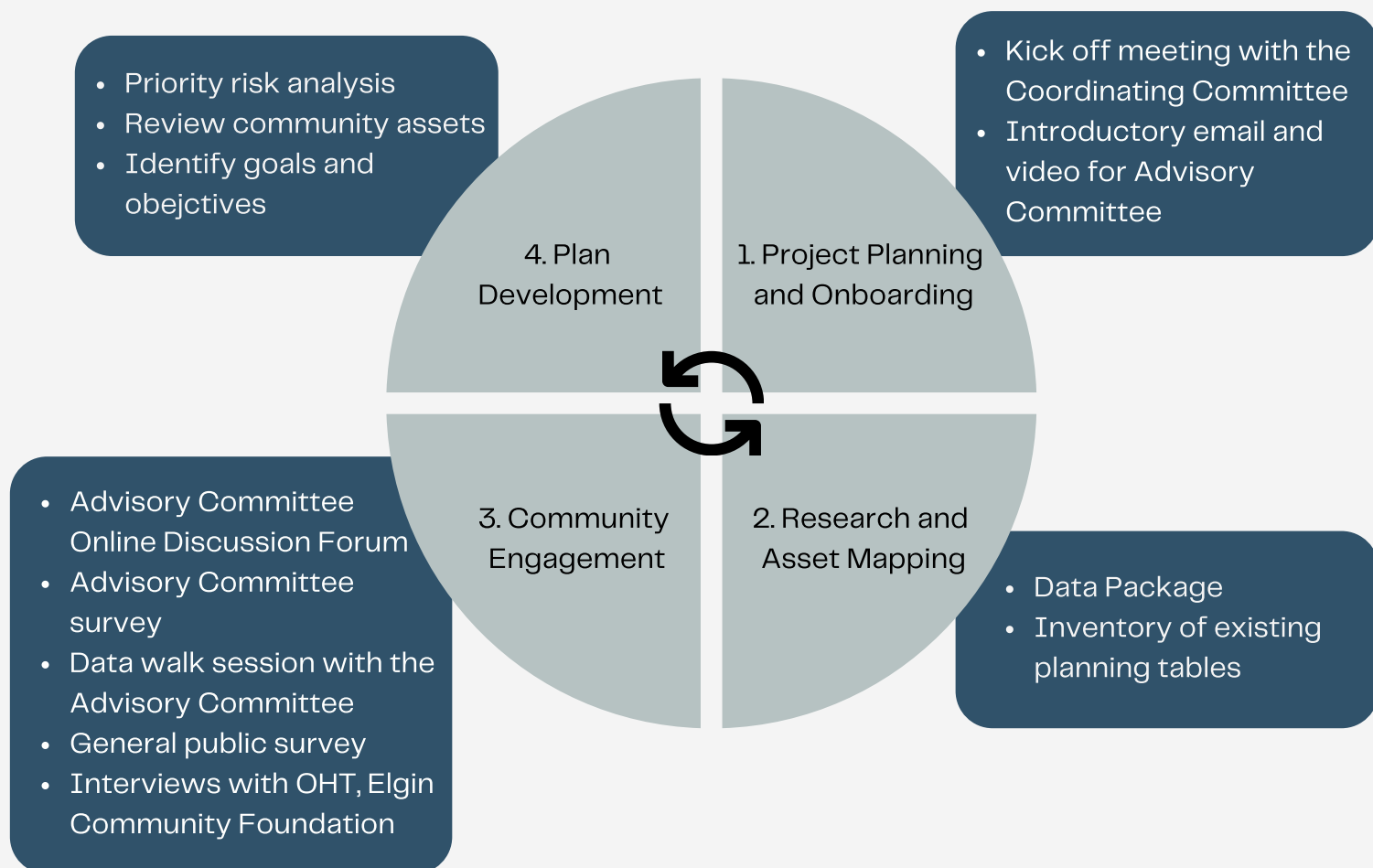
- Accessibility
- Addiction Services
- Agriculture
- Business
- Child Protection
- Children and Youth
- Children with Disabilities
- Children/Youth Mental Health
- Citizens
- Community Association
- Cultural Services
- Economic Development
- Education
- Emergency Services
- Employment
- Environment
- Faith
- Families and Children
- Food Security
- Funder
- Government
- Health
- Homelessness
- Housing
- Indigenous/First Nations
- Information
- Legal
- Literacy
- Long Term Care
- Mental Health
- Newcomers
- Persons with Disabilities
- Poverty
- Protective Services
- Seniors
- Service Club
- Social Services
- Violence Against Women
- Youth

The Advisory Committee met over the course of 2020 and early 2021.

Our Approach

With the onset and resulting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Coordinating Committee made the decision to continue with this extremely important work, and the development of the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan moved to an online process.

The community safety and well-being planning process encompassed four phases. These phases included:



Each of the four phases are described further below.

Phase 1: Project Planning and Onboarding

At the initiation of the planning for the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, a kick off meeting was held with the Coordinating Committee. In addition to this, an introductory video was produced and shared with the Advisory Committee members. The video can be found [here](#).

Phase 2: Research and Asset Mapping

The second phase of the community safety and well-being planning process focused on collecting local data and information about the communities in Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas. This is a key component in the creation of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan as it provides a snapshot, that is based on data, about what is happening in the areas of health, well-being and safety in the Elgin region.

Our Approach

Inventory of Planning Tables

An inventory of existing planning tables in Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas was also conducted. A total of 20 planning tables were identified. This inventory highlighted:

- The purpose of the planning table
- A high level description of the organizations that participate on the planning table
- A list of the strategies, projects or other current work of the planning table, including any research/reports conducted by the planning table

This inventory helped to ensure the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan did not duplicate existing work and, instead, leveraged the current planning tables in Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas and the work that they are doing.

Local Data

A key aspect in the development of the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan is making sure the plan is evidence-informed. To ensure this, local data was collected to validate resident perceptions, to support ongoing discussions related to safety and well-being, and to create a foundation from which to monitor and evaluate the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan work as it moves into implementation. A Data Package was developed to support this process. It can be found **here**.

Phase 3: Community Engagement

The third phase of the community safety and well-being planning process focused on community engagement. Throughout this phase we engaged with residents and community organizations in Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas to collect information about their perceptions of community safety and well-being. This is a key component in the creation of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan as it reveals how residents feel about the communities in which they live.

Community Consultation

To share information about the development of the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan a website was created, **<https://www.elgincounty.ca/cswb/>**. This website was developed in order to share information about the community safety and well-being planning process with residents, and to ensure residents were given the opportunity to participate in the plan's creation.

Residents were asked to provide input into the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan through the use of a survey. Both online and hard copy surveys were made available. The survey was open from July 27, 2020 to December 4, 2020. A total of 429 responses were received from residents across Elgin's geographic areas.

Our Approach

The survey focused on perceptions of community safety and well-being and priorities to include in the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas plan.

Community Organization Consultation

In May and June of 2020, community organizations were invited to participate in an online survey. This survey asked community organizations to identify service statistics they collect that can inform the development of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, local research that has been conducted that can inform the development of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, and priorities they would like to see reflected in the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. Thirty-eight (38) organizations representing 18 different sectors responded to the online survey. The sectors that responded to the survey include:

- Health (including mental health)
- Social Services
- Employment Services
- Environment
- Education
- Food Security
- Government
- Housing and Homelessness
- Service Clubs
- Child Protection
- Community Association
- Cultural Services
- Information
- Literacy
- Newcomers
- Persons with Disabilities
- Protective Services
- Arts and Culture

Phase 4: Sensemaking and Plan Development

During phase four of the community safety and well-being process, the Advisory Committee reviewed the data and information that was collected throughout the planning process, and identified priority areas for the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. Action Tables then identified goals and objectives in each priority area.



Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan 2021-2024

The Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas initial Community Safety and Well-Being Plan is a three year plan. There are many elements which create safety and well-being in a community. To ensure this plan is achievable and strategic in focus, the Advisory Committee used local data and information from the organization and community consultation process to identify five priority areas for this first plan.

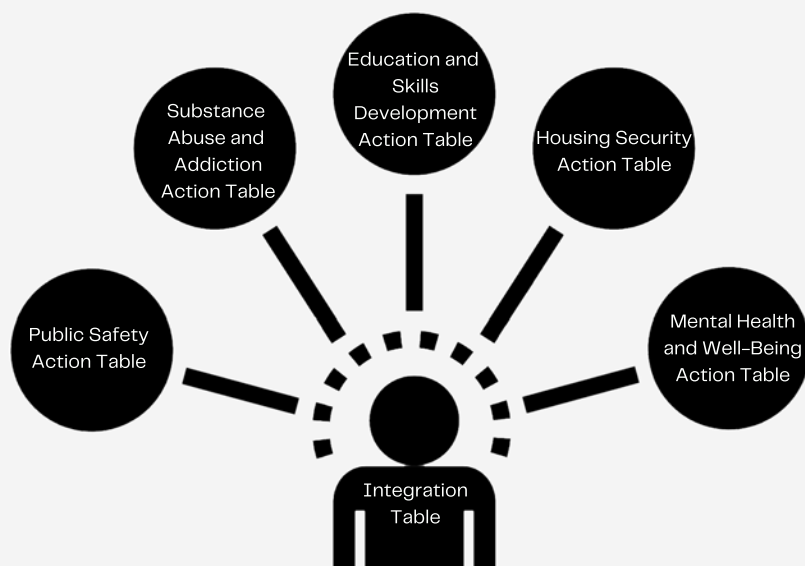
The following has been identified for the focus of the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan:

Integration of service system planning and leveraging resources for a proactive, balanced and collaborative response to big, complex issues that require an integrated solution, focusing on:

1. Education And Skills Development
2. Housing Security
3. Mental Health and Well-Being
4. Public Safety
5. Substance Use and Addiction

A structure has been established to lead the implementation of strategies and actions in each of these five areas. This structure will leverage the use of existing planning tables in Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas and ensure that there is an integrated response which leverages resources and recognizes the inter-relationships amongst these five priority areas.

An Action Table has been identified for each of the priority areas. The Action Tables' work will be connected through the establishment of an Integration Table. The Chair of each Action Table will participate in the Integration Table. The Integration Table will also include the Mayor of St. Thomas, the Elgin County Warden, a local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) and the Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) from St. Thomas and the County of Elgin. This new Integration Table will be established to ensure a proactive, balanced and collaborative response across these five priority areas.



Priority Area Summary



Education and Skills Development

Action Table: Elgin Workforce Development Network



Housing Security

Action Table: Housing and Homelessness Action Table



Mental Health and Well-Being

Action Table: Elgin Mental Health and Addiction Network



Public Safety

Action Table: Public Safety Action Table



Substance Use and Addiction

Action Table: Elgin Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Steering Committee

Education and Skills Development

21.4%

(age 15+) do not have a high school diploma

Who is going to lead this priority area?

The Action Table is the Elgin Workforce Development Network.

What did we hear about education and skills development?

- Education should support all abilities, be culturally sensitive, support diversity and anti-discrimination
- Life skills training, skills training for jobs, lifelong learning and ongoing adult education are important
- Digital literacy is a key skill
- Overall, the education level of the region's population age 15+ is lower compared to Ontario
- The percentage of students in the Thames Valley District School Board receiving an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD graduation rate) is lower than the Ontario average

What will be the focus in this area?

This priority area includes lifelong learning. Learning that encompasses children, youth, adults and seniors. It also includes alternative learning and life skills programs. To support work in this area, the Elgin Workforce Development Network will work with its community partners to develop and implement strategies to promote lifelong learning in Aylmer, Elgin, and St. Thomas. A fulsome strategy is currently being developed.

Housing Security

42%

of renters have challenges with housing affordability

Who is going to lead this priority area?

The Action Table is the Housing and Homelessness Action Table.

What did we hear about housing security?

- There is a need for a range of diverse housing options, including affordable housing, apartments, social housing, supportive housing, universal design units, transitional housing, etc.
- There is a low vacancy rate/a lack of availability of rental housing
- Rural areas have limited housing availability
- In 2018, 159 individuals were living with homelessness

What will be the focus in this area?

The following goals and objectives will be the focus of the 2021 to 2024 Community Safety and Well-Being Plan:

Goals	Objectives
Goal #1: Increase housing security, stability and access	• Increase availability of a range of diverse housing options at scattered sites, including apartments, social housing, supportive housing, universal design units, transitional housing, etc. • Increase the supply of affordable housing • Decrease the centralized housing waitlist • Increase capacity to maintain housing • Increase affordable housing benefits to enhance capacity to serve more people and at adequate levels
Goal #2: Decrease and prevent occurrences of chronic and episodic homelessness	• Implement solutions to rural homelessness • Increase awareness about St. Thomas and Elgin homelessness • Enhance service delivery to people experiencing homelessness • Implement solutions to family homelessness • Implement solutions for people exiting institutions into homelessness (jails/hospitals) • Increase and enhance connections for people experiencing homelessness to services and supports • Define and utilize a coordinated community response to homelessness (i.e. Housing First model) • Decrease barriers to accessing housing • Decrease the length of time a person experiences precarious housing or homelessness • Increase safety for people experiencing homelessness

Mental Health and Well-Being

10%

(age 12+) report fair or poor mental health

Who is going to lead this priority area?

The Action Table is the Elgin Mental Health and Addiction Network.

What did we hear about mental health and well-being?

- Need more available and affordable mental health supports/resources/services/programs
- Mental health support for people living on the streets is very limited
- Access to 24/7 crisis support needs to be available
- 72.7% of residents report a somewhat or very strong sense of belonging in their community

What will be the focus in this area?

The work in this priority area will ensure that equity, diversity and inclusion are included in planning and decisions about mental health and well-being. The following goals and objectives will be the focus of the 2021 to 2024 Community Safety and Well-Being Plan:

Goals	Objectives
Goal #1: Increase equitable access to mental health services and supports throughout Elgin County	• Remove mental health crisis from the streets • Increase access to technology and digital literacy, and expand the use of health technology to include mental health services • Develop new ways to access mental health services which complement existing services • Increase public awareness about available services and supports and how to access them • Increase coordination of service providers and community members to enhance early identification and intervention • Increase the number of supports, services and mental health professionals available • Increase access to affordable therapy • Reduce current waitlists • Advocate and apply for increased funding for mental health services and supports • Increase the number of supportive housing options
Goal #2: Enhance people's wellness and sense of well-being	• Increase public awareness about the importance of well-being • Promote self-care practices, coping skills and available resources • Increase people's sense of connection to their community and each other • Increase coordination of service providers and community members to enhance wellness • Enhance housing safety for individuals

Public Safety

4.1%

increase in total number of incidents (Police Services, 2018 to 2019)

Who is going to lead this priority area?

The Action Table is a new Public Safety Action Table.

What did we hear about public safety?

- People want to feel safe where they live
- St. Thomas was named more frequently as a community with more criminal activity
- There is not a lot of serious crime in Aylmer–Elgin–St. Thomas. Residents report experiencing and hearing about break-ins, petty theft, property theft, and drug use/drug trafficking

What will be the focus in this area?

The following goals and objectives will be the focus of the 2021 to 2024 Community Safety and Well-Being Plan:

Goals	Objectives
Goal #1: Increase traffic safety	• Educate the public about road safety programs and enforcement • Decrease the impact of driving under the influence • Decrease the impact of distracted driving and speeding • Increase the use of seatbelts • Increase bicycle lanes throughout the city and county • Improve and increase the number of sidewalks and crosswalks
Goal #2: Enhance people's wellness and sense of well-being	• Promote downtown St. Thomas as a safe place • Increase visits to downtown St. Thomas • Reduce victimization of people as a result of property crime
Goal #3: Encourage youth to actively participate in building a healthier community	• Build stronger relationships with youth • Use holistic strategies and a community-based multi-partner approach to encourage youth in making good, responsible decisions in order to avoid criminal activity
Goal #4: Cultivate partnerships to create resilient and safe communities	• Increase collaborative efforts with community partners to address social issues/root causes • Increase the street outreach presence of community partners • Enhance and increase community engagement, integrated response models and victim assistance • Educate the public about appropriate resources/ services, other than police services • Increase awareness about human trafficking • Promote equity, diversity and inclusion

Substance Use and Addiction

Between 2013–2018, the number of Emergency Department visits for opioid overdoses has increased.

Who is going to lead this priority area?

The Action Table is the Elgin Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Steering Committee.

What did we hear about substance use and addiction?

- Substance use and addictions are increasing and are very prevalent in St. Thomas, specifically in the core of the city
- There is a lack of services, supports and resources in this area, especially in small communities
- Alcohol is still the biggest challenge and impact
- There is a growing overdose/opioid crisis

What will be the focus in this area?

The following vision will be the focus of the 2021 to 2024 Community Safety and Well-Being Plan:

“A safe and healthy community in Elgin without the negative impacts of drugs and alcohol.”

The Elgin Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Steering Committee is developing a Strategy Report to move toward achieving this vision. This Strategy Report will be created by the end of 2021 and will include four pillars:

- Prevention
- Harm Reduction
- Treatment
- Justice

The guiding themes for each pillar include:

01	Community Coordination	• Coordination Recommendations • Collaboration Recommendations • Leadership Recommendations
02	Service Enhancement	• Enhancement Recommendations • New Program Recommendations • Access Recommendations
03	Building Community Capacity	• Education Recommendations • Training Recommendations • Capacity Building Recommendations
04	Research & Development	• Research Request Recommendations • Municipal/County Bylaw Recommendations • Indicators Recommendations
05	Impacts Beyond Our Region	• Provincial /Federal Recommendations • High Level Advocacy Recommendations • Funding Request Recommendations

Moving Forward

It takes many people and community partners to create and maintain community safety and well-being. Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas' first Community Safety and Well-Being Plan has been built on a strong foundation of data, local information and community partnerships. Many of the priority areas identified in this Community Safety and Well-Being Plan are outside the mandate of local municipalities and require an infusion of funding to make a meaningful difference. We, and our community partners, have been working on these areas, but our community requires adequate funding from the provincial government to make impactful change.

This plan leverages existing planning tables to maximize their great work and to help us continue to move the needle on community safety and well-being in Elgin. Let us continue together with our collaborative approach to create a vibrant, equitable, inclusive, safe and healthy community.



Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of all individuals, local agencies and service providers involved in the development of the Aylmer-Elgin-St. Thomas Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. We appreciate and want to thank all of you.

In particular we would like to recognize those individuals who participated on the Community Safety and Well-Being Coordinating Committee:

- Joe Preston, Mayor, City of St. Thomas
- Steve Peters, Councillor, City of St. Thomas
- Sally Martyn, Councillor, Elgin County Council
- Mary French, Councillor, Elgin County Council
- Zvonko Horvat, Police Chief, Town of Aylmer
- Chris Herridge, Police Chief, City of St. Thomas
- Mike Butler, Inspector, Elgin OPP
- Wendell Graves, City Manager, City of St. Thomas
- Josh Brick Clerk, Town of Aylmer
- Julie Gonyou, CAO, County of Elgin
- Carolyn Krahn, Legislative Coordinator, County of Elgin
- Katherine Thompson, Manager of Administrative Services/Deputy Clerk, County of Elgin

Contact

Aylmer, Elgin & St. Thomas CSWB Plan

519-631-1460, ext. 156

www.elgincounty.ca/cswb/

cswb@ELGIN.ca

