Engagement Summary: What We Heard

Waterloo Region’s Community Safety & Wellbeing Framework

Prepared by LURA Consulting
# DRAFT Engagement Summary: What We Heard

Waterloo Region’s Community Safety & Wellbeing Framework

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Introduction
The Region of Waterloo is working collaboratively with partners and communities across Waterloo Region to develop a Framework to improve safety and wellbeing for all. The Framework aims to solidify a process for action, recognizing outcomes will evolve, change, and grow with the needs of the community.

While the development of the Framework is an opportunity to acknowledge and leverage the good work being done in the community, it also provides an opportunity to have conversations about what is working well and what needs to change – building on previous recommendations and calls to action. It is an opportunity for all to be part of a process aimed at galvanizing and creating momentum for producing a community-owned and community-led actionable plan that leverages the past and helps improve the safety and wellbeing of the community.

This Framework is not meant to be a static document. Instead, it is intended to be a shared vision of safety and wellbeing that articulates the core elements, conditions, and barriers to achieving the vision of safety and wellbeing for all.

The goal is to enable every person who calls Waterloo Region home to feel safe, feel like they are cared for, and have the opportunity to thrive. As the Framework evolves, there will be a continued conversation with the community on the actions to achieve this goal.

Engagement Overview
Understanding the community’s perspectives, priorities, and needs is vital to successfully developing the Community Safety and Wellbeing (CSWB) Framework. Recognizing the extensive engagement conducted by many organizations and collaboratives across Waterloo Region on community safety and wellbeing, the CSWB engagement process was designed to build on existing engagement, identify gaps, and specifically identify barriers to action. It was also designed to take a pulse check following the pandemic, identifying any new and emerging themes and needs since engagement conducted prior to COVID-19.

Three committees (Steering Committee, Advisory Group and Youth Advisory Committee) were created to provide foundational guidance to develop the Framework. These committees bring together local leaders, youth, area municipalities, the Region's Anti-Racism Advisory Committee and First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and community organizations focused on wellbeing.

Details on the membership of the Steering Committee, the Advisory Group and the Youth Advisory Committee can be found on the following webpage:
Region of Waterloo Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan

Steering Committee
While the provincial government requires an advisory committee of sector leaders, a steering committee was intentionally created to ensure diverse voices at the governance and decision-making level. The Steering Committee membership includes two members of the Region's Anti-Racism Advisory Working Group, two members representing racialized communities, four community leaders involved in work to improve community safety and wellbeing, the Regional Chair and Chair of the Police Services Board, a member of the Regional Council, and a member of the Police Services Board.
Journey to a Well and Safe Community

Mapping Community Assets and Research/Data collection

Identification of Outcomes and Priorities

Ongoing Collaborative Engagement and Action

Creation of Advisory Groups and Development of Process

Community Engagement and Outreach

Collaborative Development of Framework with Focus on Action

Outcomes, measurements and goals

Conditions for wellbeing and safety

Foundational things to grow, create, explore

Barriers to change

Safe, equitable and fair education, health care and mental health services, social services, housing, seniors services and supports, justice, employment, children and youth, and accessibility.
Foundational things to grow, create, explore

- A complete list of calls to action that drive change and real action
- Institutions to review their skills, capacity and curriculum - e.g. seniors care, health care, social worker etc.
- Equity of investment and funding
- Community driven through research, planning to implementing and learning
- Restorative justice
- Community led support structure / recreating villages
- Prioritize working with institutions and communities that know how to do the work
- Review of institutionally held roles for safety and wellbeing (for example, police)
- Expanded outreach and engagement - to increase representation
- Bridges between grassroots groups and leadership
- Representation in political office, school boards, Council leadership
- Leadership and representation in service planning/delivery and policy
- Proper accountability
- Accessible and physically safe spaces
- Data equity / community led / driven research / data collection
- Culturally safe spaces
- Equity in technology
- Government advocacy
- Indigenous land based learning and community hub

Conditions for wellbeing and safety

- Truth and Reconciliation
- Addressing systems that limit safety and wellbeing
- Making representation meaningful and powerful
- Committing to anti-hate and anti-racism
- Building understanding and pursuing a sense of belonging
- Creating intentionally structured accountability
- Creating cultural safety
- Provide basic needs
- Strengthening communities - build social capital
- Honouring identities and understanding intersectionalities
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Advisory Group

The Advisory Group is a cross-sector table of leaders, meeting the provincial requirement to include leaders from sectors including health, municipal, housing, family and children’s services, mental health, education, justice, etc., that can commit their organizations to action. The Advisory Group is an expanded table of the Wellbeing Waterloo Region Systems Change Champions table designed to identify system barriers and capacity for action.

Youth Advisory Committee

The Waterloo Region Community Safety and Wellbeing Youth Advisory Committee, created in partnership with the Children and Youth Planning Table/Smart Waterloo Region, is an autonomous group of 20 diverse youth committed to identifying opportunities to improve community safety and wellbeing for all.

In addition to reviewing existing engagement and listening to the advice and direction of the committees, an engagement process was launched to capture diverse community voices through consultation with community leaders. These intentional conversations were meant to ensure traditionally underrepresented voices were heard and integral to the development of the Framework.

Engagement Questions

The engagement activities centred around the following key questions:

- What does a community look like that has achieved CSWB for all?
- How might community safety and wellbeing look different or similar across communities within Waterloo Region?
- What are the greatest assets?
- Based on your understanding of the community, what do you think are the top priorities for CSWB in Waterloo Region?
- Where do we most need big change right now?

Engagement Methods

Note – this document is in draft form and only includes engagement activities completed up to December 01, 2021. Additional insights will be added as conversations continue.

While the process was originally designed to focus on risks to safety and wellbeing for all, direction from the Steering Committee changed the process to understand the needs and barriers of those most unwell and unsafe in Waterloo Region. This focused the engagement on conversations with community leaders closest to these communities and reviewing past relevant engagement information.

In addition, the value of “always space at the table” as was used to ensure those who are not part of existing networks could be invited to join the conversation. Community leaders and community organizations were asked to suggest other leaders or organizations who should be invited into this process.

By offering flexible options for engagements, barriers to accessibility were reduced. This included offering both individual engagements and group engagements, both daytime and evening options. Responses were collected from the Steering Committee, Advisory Group, Youth Advisory Group, and community leaders through virtual workshops and meetings.
While this approach reduced the potential for engagement fatigue amongst individuals with lived experience, there are limitations to the perspectives captured. We recognize that many individuals, organizations, and groups have perspectives to share on what makes a community safe and well. One voice does not speak for an entire community.

Participants highlighted the importance of providing opportunities to gather insights, perspectives and contributions from those with lived experience as the process moves from framework development to action and implementation. In addition, given the COVID-19 pandemic, all engagements were conducted virtually, creating a potential technological access barrier to participation.

Feedback Analysis
Qualitative feedback was gathered through meetings, workshops, conversations involving various community organizations/groups/leaders and representing various communities (table with relevant details included below). Feedback was collected, recorded and tabulated by LURA Consulting and summaries were shared back with participants to ensure it was reflective of the conversations. All qualitative responses received have undergone a thematic analysis. This involves summarizing and categorizing qualitative data to capture important concepts with the data set. The results of this analysis are presented in the following sections.

Consultations included:

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<th>Community/ Groups Represented</th>
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<tr>
<td>First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities</td>
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<td>African, Caribbean, Black communities</td>
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<td>People with Disabilities</td>
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<td>Community organizations and leaders involved in vaccine roll-out in high priority communities</td>
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<td>Chinese Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jewish Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>2S/LGBTQ+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muslim Community</td>
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<td>Immigrant and Newcomers</td>
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<td>Women/Children (Victims of sexual assault/abuse, sexual health education and supports)</td>
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What We Heard
This section summarizes the details of “what we heard” so far from diverse members of local communities about community safety and wellbeing in Waterloo Region through various engagement activities, including community meetings, workshops, and interviews.

The following summarizes the feedback received from community leaders, the Youth Committee, the Advisory Group, and the Steering Committee members. The summary is organized into the following sub-sections:

- What makes a community safe and well;
- Key conditions needed to create safety and wellbeing for all;
- Additional insights shared to inform the CSWB framework.

A Safe and Well Community for All
At the outset and throughout this process, the community leaders, the Advisory Group and the Steering Committee members were asked to describe what a safe and well community would look and feel like.

Participants emphasized that, in a safe and well community, all community members would have their basic needs met, including housing, childcare, food, income, education, and justice. Participants stated that a community is safe and well when the appropriate supports are in place for people in crisis. Mental health would receive significant attention and supports for all. People have the physical space they need for cultural practices and ceremonies. People who are Indigenous, Black, African, Caribbean, racialized, marginalized and others who are traditionally underrepresented are represented in positions of power. All people would have equal access to participate in conversations related to their safety and wellbeing. They would feel safe, valued and able to express themselves freely.

Ultimately, inequities in the community would be addressed at the systems level to support the wellbeing and safety of those at the greatest risk, and communities would be resourced to self-determine the programs, services, and initiatives needed so that everyone is safe well.

Throughout the discussions, participants identified a series of core elements that ensure that a community remains safe and well. While there can be many factors that can make a community safe, there are some that strongly resonated with the community throughout our engagement. These are summarized below:

Strong Families
According to participants, strong families (and informal support networks) are at the heart of community safety and wellbeing. Strong families provide the structure that holds our communities together and helps them to remain resilient when confronted with crises. It is families that make up communities, and without strong families, communities cannot be strong. Participants particularly noted the family support systems that can be provided by families embedded in communities. These support systems can ensure circles of support to meet the various needs of the community with less dependency on systems to fill the gaps. Families were most often described as circles of support which can look different for many people and may be friends, community leaders, neighbours and others rather than a traditional view of family. Participants also shared the impact of the legacy of the residential school system on families and the resulting need for support to connect Indigenous residents with their communities and support cultural networks of support.
Self-determined Communities
Participants noted that without any sense of power, communities could not flourish. Empowered, self-determined communities lay the foundation for their safety and wellbeing. But communities are often disempowered by systems placing barriers in their way. Systems can take away their sense of power and limit them from reaching their full potential. Power comes when communities are supported in defining and pursuing their own future; when they can be represented by their own; when they are able to practice, preserve and promote their own value systems and traditions without being made to lose their sense of identity and worth.

Accountable Systems
Systems accountability starts with those responsible for creating and running the system. Participants advocated for greater accountability from politicians and those in positions of power and decision-making. According to participants, systems that remain accountable are designed and structured in a manner consistent with the aspirations of the communities and keep their wellbeing as central. Such systems work with communities in defining their better future and then support them in achieving it. There are measurable and attainable goals with clear outcomes.

Conditions for Safety & Wellbeing
Through discussions with community leaders, the Youth Committee, the Advisory Group, and the Steering Committee, participants discussed key barriers to safety and wellbeing. They identified a series of elements or system conditions that would foster a safe and well community. The key conditions shared are organized as follows:

- Demonstrate commitment to Truth and Reconciliation
- Addressing Systems that Limit Our Sense of Safety and Wellbeing;
- Making Representation Meaningful and Powerful;
- Committing to Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism;
- Building Understanding and Pursuing a Sense of Belonging;
- Creating Intentionally Structured Accountability;
- Creating Cultural Safety;
- Strengthening Communities – Building Social Capital; and,
- Providing Basic Supports and Services that Meet Community Needs.

Demonstrate commitment to Truth and Reconciliation
For Truth and Reconciliation to be meaningful, municipalities and other sectors and systems need to first address the "Truth" and take the necessary actions towards Reconciliation. This includes acknowledging and restoring Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination; and honouring and respecting Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, traditions, customs, and ceremonies.

Municipalities and other sector and system leads need to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) calls to action and local calls to actions already made by taking action now. Participants shared that First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities are willing to work alongside municipal and system leaders in implementing these recommendations. They shared that more conversations are happening and some actions are being taken as a result, and that this needs to be amplified.
It was shared that systems continue to be behind in addressing First Nation, Metis and Inuit concerns related to systemic barriers and discrimination in health care, education, justice, and children's aid and childcare. Specifically, there are needs for:

- Culturally appropriate health care service and Indigenous wholistic health care model
- Training for service providers to understand Indigenous histories, intergenerational trauma and impacts of residential schools on safety and wellbeing
- Supportive and safe spaces for First Nation, Metis and Inuit youth in school systems. Indigenous youth centers and safe spaces are needed in elementary, middle and high schools
- Opportunities and spaces for land-based learnings, especially for youth
- Land and space for community gatherings and ceremonies, a safe space for this could look like an Indigenous hub
- Greater access to services such as a central, one-stop space to access many services in culturally safe ways
- Broader representation of, and engagement with, the diverse First Nation, Metis and Inuit organizations and leaders and experiences (including youth and Indigiqueer youth, Metis, and Inuit peoples). Participants raised that there seems to be the same set of voices representing the First Nation, Metis and Inuit peoples at planning tables and committees when there are thousands of voices to be heard. The Region, systems and sectors leads need to engage a broader range of organizations, leaders, and residents.

When discussing data, there were unique considerations related to data for First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities raised. This includes past experiences and harms faced by the community that make them less willing to self-identify and provide demographic data. First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities need to be meaningfully engaged in the data collection process. Colonial informed processes, tools, and definitions do not meet the unique needs and identities within First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities. Participants shared that data collection should be community driven and community based with First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities leading their own research and conducting their own data collection with adequate and appropriate funding and resources.

**Address Systems That Limit Our Sense of Safety and Wellbeing**

Participants strongly indicated the need to develop the CSWB Framework through the lens of addressing systemic barriers responsible for creating and perpetuating obstacles for those traditionally underserved and underrepresented. Opportunities to address systemic barriers were identified across multiple systems, including healthcare, education, justice, employment and immigration, and across the Region's economy as a whole.

**Health care**

Across systems, participants highlighted the importance of culturally-sensitive and safe care and service provision. For example, it was recommended that healthcare workers be supported in developing skills, understanding, and tools to better serve culturally diverse residents and those facing the greatest access barriers. This was noted as particularly important for those who may be deterred from accessing support due to language barriers, mistrust, or mental health challenges.

Concern for the safety and wellbeing of the seniors came up across conversations with different community leaders. Current gaps related to culturally appropriate and trauma informed care...
among service providers and health care providers were a key issue. This was directly attributed to the current gap in curriculum and training for health care professionals and social services providers related to offering culturally sensitive, safe and trauma-informed care for the aging population.

The pandemic has further compounded the barriers that many elderly and seniors face by increasing social isolation and reducing services and supports. It was shared that the way forward should include better policies to support elders and seniors across government levels and sectors that address physical safety and accessibility, financial security and enhanced services for mental health and belonging.

**Education**

Participants shared the importance of the education system in addressing hate and oppression, and as a foundation for Truth and Reconciliation. It was also recommended that race disparities be addressed in the education system and that educators be supported in developing their understanding of students from different socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom.

**Supporting Youth**

Participants shared a need to focus on Indigenous (First Nation, Metis, and Inuit), Black (African, Caribbean and Black) and other racialized youth as they are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, family and children's services, and are most likely to face racism, discrimination and experience homelessness.

More opportunities for youth to have meaningful jobs, internships and experiences across sectors are needed. This would include positive role models with whom youth would feel connected and represent the diversity of youth identities and experiences. Participants shared that racialized students and youth are leaving the region because they don't feel like they belong here due to the lack of visibility and representation of role models in local media and government and different levels of leadership across sectors (education, health care, justice, social services etc.) Participants shared that systems (for example, education, justice) give young boys (Indigenous, Black and racialized) the wrong message that they are not worth investing in or that they don't belong in mainstream spaces when there aren't opportunities, role models and representation of people like them within these systems.

The Youth Advisory Council (YAC) looked specifically at what a youth-centered approach to safety and wellbeing would look like. Many identified the core need of belonging and inclusion. In order to achieve this goal, youth are advocating for their voice in decision making and changemaking at all levels as much as possible. In addition, the YAC sees a way forward with youth not just addressing youth based topics, but having their ideas and collaboration on issues at large. During their work together, the YAC discussed how systems of oppression were limiting not just them, but their families, friends and neighbours, and expressed many ideas and plans on how to create system change. Valuing youth ideas as equal and just as valid as older people in the community was seen as a necessary and positive way forward.

Members of the queer community shared a heightened sense of concern for safety which is compounded if you are Indigenous, or racialized or a combination of both with added intersectionality of being a youth. For example, Indigequeer or two-spirit. They shared that there
are very few safe spaces and tailored programs where indigequeer and two-spirit youth feel welcome and included.

Additional insights from youth have been heard through the Community Safety and Wellbeing Youth Advisory Committee.

*Justice, Police, and mental health responses*

Participants shared different experiences interacting with police across their communities. While there is an appreciation for the role that police play in keeping people safe, this has not been true for all communities equally. The perceptions of police presence and surveillance and resulting feelings of safety are mixed. This was consistently voiced in conversations related to safety and wellbeing for First Nation, Metis and Inuit communities and African, Caribbean, and Black communities (especially for youth). Alternative safety and crisis response models that included care and concern without punitive measures were discussed that would centre community-led approaches partnered with mental health and social service professionals. Having the right supports available is essential, especially one that connects the individual experiencing the crisis with the right supports within a community to address the immediate and root causes and issues that led to the crisis. Participants shared the need for continued training of officers and other front-line emergency responders in mental health.

Some participants shared experiences with community-oriented policing initiatives they felt were important to continue, while others highlighted the need for increase police services to support road safety, particularly in rural communities.

Through community consultations, restorative justice was noted as a potential framework for conflict management when supporting people from different community groups, mainly when there are differing priorities.

*Immigration & Employment*

From an immigration and employment perspective, participants highlighted the challenges of recognizing accreditation and skillsets from abroad and working in a second language. It was suggested that newcomers can be supported in navigating systems for upgrading their credentials or obtaining the necessary licenses to obtain jobs that reflect their full set of skills.

The language was one of the biggest barriers consistently discussed across consultations. This was shared in relation to most new immigrants and refugees (although this can still be true for immigrants who have lived here for many years). Sectors and systems continue to disadvantage people by only offering services, programs and information in English. A coordinated approach to offering language-based supports is a huge gap and continues to impact safely and wellbeing negatively.

Employment was another big concern raised, as well as the ongoing racism and discrimination faced during employment. Participants shared that employers are not valuing, rewarding and investing in the diverse set of skills, experiences and attributes immigrant employees bring to the workforce.

Participants also discussed the importance of supporting infrastructure in complete communities as a holistic view of community safety and wellbeing. They noted a need to improve accessibility and safety for people with disabilities and emphasized the development, improvement, and maintenance of physical infrastructure (sidewalks, trails, safe roads, etc.).
Making Representation Meaningful and Powerful

Participants noted that representation at the highest level is essential for uplifting and validating diverse, underrepresented community groups. Meaningful representation allows communities' voices to be heard through a lens of shared experiences, histories and identities. These could include, for example, attaining management and leadership positions in diverse sectors of the economy. Participants also emphasized that racialized communities should be represented at all levels of government, including the Regional Council. They should hold political offices and leadership roles in policymaking and service delivery.

Committing to Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism

Addressing systemic inequities was identified as a cornerstone to a successful CSWB Framework. Participants recognized the work occurring to foster equity, inclusion and recognize diversity across Waterloo Region. However, it was noted that racism and hate can be lost within the definition and discussions of equity, diversity and inclusion. It was recommended that anti-hate and anti-racism be elevated to an overarching principle within the CSWB Framework and for commitment to anti-hate and anti-racism to be explicitly stated within Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives. It was also recommended that EDI policies have a monitoring and review framework to ensure that they achieve the objectives of safety and wellbeing for traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups who face the greatest barriers.

Participants emphasized that community-wide education on the unique obstacles and challenges faced by those who experience hate and racism can effectively address hate and racism. In particular, education and public awareness efforts can focus on understanding diverse religious practices and different lived experiences in terms of abilities (disabilities, neurodiversity, etc.) and cultural backgrounds.

Governments and systems need to take responsibility and create opportunities for open dialogue and discussions on hate, racism and discrimination. It was recommended that part of this needs to be a "truth campaign" that actively works to dispel lies, myths, and stereotypes perpetuated on the media, social media, and other communication channels.

Anti-racism and anti-hate policies across organizations, sectors and government systems is needed. Racism and discrimination that manifests in Anti-Indigenous racism, Anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, Anti Semitism, Anti-2SLGBTQ+ discrimination and Anti-Asian racism needs to be addressed proactively and not reactivity. Policies would include Anti-racism assessment and decision-making principles.

Intersectionality

Another essential theme that came up across conversations is the impact that intersectionality has on people’s experiences. Experiences of barriers, oppression and discrimination are compounded by people’s different social identities and the intersection of these identities. Governments and systems need to acknowledge and understand the realities of intersectionality to be able to respond to the impacts of intersectionality on people’s experiences of discrimination and oppression, safety and wellbeing. The overlap and intersections raised in the consultations include race, age, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, immigrant/newcomer status, and physical ability (but can include anything that can marginalize people) and how these combine to produce different levels and experiences of discrimination and oppression or privilege and power. For example, for some the experiences of racism and discrimination are multiplied by also identifying as Two-Spirit and/or queer and further
compounded by also being a youth. As the intersectionality increases, fewer and fewer culturally safe and inclusive spaces, programs and services exist, contributing to further isolation and othering.

**Building Understanding and Pursuing a Sense of Belonging**
Belonging creates a sense of security, support, acceptance, identity and inclusion. It encompasses feeling valued and heard as part of a community. Participants noted the importance of developing neighbourhoods that welcome diverse backgrounds, such as providing spaces for different cultural groups and enabling multi-generational housing. They highlighted the importance of creating opportunities and systems that make sure diverse voices are valued, recognized and heard. Opportunities to build connections through community-building activities and partnering were highlighted.

Participants emphasized the power of reflecting the diversity of identity in how events and programs are planned and delivered to foster a greater sense of community and belonging. For example, including culture-specific food options such as kosher and halal is deeply meaningful and welcoming for people from diverse backgrounds. It is imperative that programs and community outreach to be delivered by individuals from the communities being served.

**Creating Intentionally Structured Accountability**
Community members know the drivers for change and the barriers to safety and wellbeing based on lived experiences. In recent years, community groups have brought forward many "calls to action" to address racism, discrimination and elevate safety and wellbeing. The "calls to action" support the need for and are critical to the development of this Framework. While each is unique, many of the calls to action were consistently echoed across the consultations, such as support for community-led organizations, issues of representation, acceptance and recognition, funding, systems change, anti-racism and anti-hate, affordable and accessible housing, healthcare access, land, education, and reporting on action. Participants shared a need to develop appropriate accountability structures to ensure these "calls to action" are being implemented. Participants specifically emphasized that the Truth and Reconciliation "calls to action" should inform the development of all elements of the CSWB Framework.

A key theme from the consultations was collecting, interpreting, and disaggregating data to provide a more fulsome understanding of community-specific wellbeing and safety. There are also concerns that the data collected can be biased against specific groups, depending on the language and tools used in the data collection. For this reason, community members from underrepresented groups should be involved in the design, administration, and evaluation of data collection specific to their population and ultimately own the data collected. Participants emphasized there is an opportunity to increase engagement with traditionally underrepresented groups on the data collected, and how it is being used to advance the outcomes of this CSWB Framework. This can help build trust and partnerships between the Region and local groups towards addressing their community's needs and challenges.

**Creating Cultural Safety**
Each community has unique stories and experiences with unique socio-cultural, religious, spiritual connections, relationships, and values. There is a desire to create an equitable sense of power across groups and the community. Many participants pointed out the significance of protecting these diverse values and systems by creating physical and psychological space for communities. These spaces would allow individuals to feel their unique background is valued and express themselves freely. Participants discussed the value of Governments and systems
and communities working together in truly valuing different communities. This will involve recognizing, acknowledging, and confronting the nature of structural and cultural violence perpetrated against Indigenous, Black, African, Caribbean, and marginalized community groups.

The importance of creating spaces and ensuring safety and equity for community groups representing diverse value systems to come together and express themselves fully without any fear was emphasized. Governments and systems were encouraged to work with various communities to support their needs for safe physical spaces. The provision of safe physical spaces was critical for creating a sense of personal, spiritual, and cultural safety and wellbeing and resonated strongly in all conversations. This includes the creation of a community hub for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, building visibility for gender-neutral washrooms and spaces for the transgender community, and provision of queer-friendly, queer-only spaces. Participants shared that community programs at community centers should reflect the community and offer culturally appropriate and relevant programs and be offered by staff and volunteers who reflect the diversity of community members accessing the centres. Participants also noted that the education system could create support structures to meet the specific cultural and religious needs of the various communities and awareness initiatives around different community groups.

**Strengthening Communities - Building Social Capital**
Participants across all conversations agreed that in a safe and well community, the needs of all individuals are met, whether the needs relate to healthcare, education, housing or safety and security. Strong families and support networks were seen as the pillars of a healthy community. There was a consensus among participants that investments in families and support networks must be prioritized and require intentional, sustainable support.

**Grassroots organizations + Self-determination**
Across conversations with different communities, the role of grassroots and other community organizations in understanding and providing needed support that was welcomed by community members was highlighted. Communities can best create a sense of belonging through informal and formal networks and groups. Often, such grassroots organizations took action and developed programs to fill gaps in services and supports many community members face. This approach is community-defined and community-led. Programs reinforce community self-identity, cultural practices and historical roots to help members feel connected and positively contribute to a sense of wellbeing. Examples included land-based programs, cultural expressions in arts and other creative expressions, or alternative programs to keep youth meaningfully engaged. All of these provide safe spaces and culturally appropriate experiences and center around what communities have determined to be meaningful.

Community-led strategies and programs are transformative but require adequate funding and resources. More funding and resources from municipal governments and other sectors to grassroots and community organizations is needed. Participants stressed the need to review existing funding models to maximize the impact of grassroots organizations and upstream prevention and intervention.

**Providing Basic Supports and Services that Meet Community Needs**
Participants emphasized that a systems approach is needed instead of service-specific changes so that all community members have access to basic supports and services. Participants acknowledged that while many basic services, such as healthcare and childcare, are dependent
on action from other levels of government, the Region should strongly advocate for systemic changes that account for the diverse needs of traditionally underserved groups who face the greatest barriers to safety and wellbeing. For example, the Region can advocate for affordable childcare options that are accessible to children with developmental disabilities and advocate for more youth, queer, and transgender-focused mental health care services, recognizing that mental health issues disproportionately impact these groups.

Participants also recognized how increased social services greatly benefited traditionally underserved groups during the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed concern about services being cut as funding sources come to an end. Participants strongly advocated for a continuation of the social services that were enhanced during the pandemic. In particular, programs that support residents suffering from isolation, addiction, homelessness, and mental health challenges were noted as things to grow. It was suggested that programs be designed to support residents beyond crisis management, enabling them to build sustained security.

Community Safety & Wellbeing – Community's Advice to the Region
Through conversations, participants provided several recommendations to strengthen the CSWB planning and implementation process.

Building on Existing Work
Early in the process, the Steering Committee and Advisory Group highlighted the importance of building on the good work occurring in the community to address community safety and wellbeing. This sentiment was shared through conversations with community leaders. There was also recognition that good work is happening across large and smaller grassroots organizations. Through the scan of strategic plans and calls to action, more than 150 resources were identified by community leaders that recommend action in some facet of community safety and wellbeing. These reports and plans provide a strong foundation for our work as a community. As such, it was recommended that this initiative focus on the individuals, groups, and communities who are the least safe and well.

Similarly, several substantial engagements related to community safety and wellbeing have occurred in Waterloo Region within the last five years. For example, surveys such as the Waterloo Region Community Wellbeing Survey, Youth Impact Survey, Immigration Matters Survey, Waterloo Region Area Survey, and community conversations about substance use in youth, Indigenous Community priorities, Islamophobia, etc., provide a foundation of community perceptions on issues and priorities.

Lastly, it is important to recognize the local organizations already working in this space. It is imperative that we collectively work together to strengthen processes, collaboration, and ultimately safety and wellbeing outcomes.

Engaging Purposefully & Letting Communities Decide What Makes Them Feel Safe
Participants highlighted the importance of being respectful and inclusive of different lived experiences and perspectives. It was noted that some groups might be more comfortable engaging in the process and voicing concerns. Governments and systems must intentionally create a balance of representation and opportunity to share input for all the people it engages.

While noting the diversity of communities, their needs, and aspirations, participants advocated for a broad definition of safety and wellbeing. Participants emphasized the importance of co-designing community safety and wellbeing to shape a future where each community’s identity is reflected and valued.
Participants highlighted the importance of engaging youth and ensuring their aspirations, concerns, experiences, and recommendations are incorporated into the CSWB framework. There was recognition that seniors also face unique safety and wellbeing barriers and that seniors themselves should define solutions.

**Collaboration and Partnerships**
While there is significant work occurring in the region, organizations highlighted the need to define new ways of working together that break down silos, recognize and build on the strengths of others, and avoid duplication of efforts. Participants highlighted that opportunities to collaborate and partner are deeply valued by those traditionally underrepresented and should be central to developing the CSWB Framework. As such, participants asked that timing be strategic so that these community members avoid consultation fatigue and can have confidence in there being beneficial outcomes to their involvement.

**Need for Action Now**
Many participants expressed frustrations and concerns about the progress on previous calls to action, consultations, and engagements.

Communities are asking governments and systems to act now and be accountable in appropriately taking action on the issues raised through these conversations and in the many previous consultations, engagements, and calls to action.

Clear, attainable goals and outcomes with proper measurement and an accountability framework is needed to ensure systems change and demonstrate action. To be accountable for meaningful systems change that address systemic racism and discrimination at its roots, community engagement and leadership in the design, implementation and monitoring is critical. This model will also ensure that responses made by systems and governments to bring change and improve safety and wellbeing match community-identified needs and priorities.