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*Centre for the  
Study of Living Standards  
Centre d'étude des  
niveaux de vie*

## **A Quality of Life Index for Ontario**

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Session 6A: Conceptual and Empirical Issues in the Measurement of Well-being  
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# A Quality of Life Index for Ontario

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# QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX

## REPORT SUMMARY

Major changes are taking place in Ontario which are having dramatic effects on the health and well-being of residents. They include:

- economic re-structuring and high unemployment
- government cuts in social programs
- devolution of responsibilities to the provinces and municipalities
- reduced roles of governments in economic and social development
- increasing poverty, especially for young families

The Quality of Life Index was conceived in this environment as a community development strategy to monitor the living and working conditions of Ontarians.

Quality of life is defined as:

*“The product of the interplay among social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect human and social development.”*

The purpose of the Quality of Life Index (QLI) is to provide a tool for community development which can be used to monitor key indicators that encompass the social, health, environmental and economic dimensions of the quality of life. The QLI can be used to comment frequently on key issues that affect people and contribute to the public debate about how to improve the quality of life in our communities and our province.

The following indicators are included in the Quality of Life Index:

**SOCIAL**: Children in care of Children’s Aid Societies; social assistance recipients; public housing waiting lists.

**HEALTH**: Low birth weight babies; elderly waiting for placement in long term care facilities; suicide rates.

**ECONOMIC**: Number of people unemployed; number of people working; bankruptcies.

**ENVIRONMENTAL**: Hours of poor air quality; environmental spills; tonnes diverted from landfill to blue boxes.

The Quality of Life Index has been calculated for 1997 and was updated in the Spring of 1998. Based on these calculations, the quality of life has declined in Ontario since 1990. A closer look at the twelve indicators reveals progress in some areas and setbacks in others. Access to information has raised a number of problems and issues which are discussed.

For more information, visit our website:

**[www.qli-ont.org](http://www.qli-ont.org)**

# A QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX FOR ONTARIO

## INTRODUCTION

Major changes are taking place in Ontario which are having dramatic effects on the health and well-being of residents. They include:

- economic re-structuring and high unemployment
- government cuts in social programs
- devolution of responsibilities to the provinces and municipalities
- reduced roles of governments in economic and social development
- increasing poverty, especially for young families

The impacts of these changes are felt primarily by vulnerable people: women, children, people with disabilities, and people living in poverty. These population groups are also at higher risk for poor health.

Social development councils (i.e. Social Planning Councils, Community Development Councils) across Ontario have documented the impact of cutbacks on communities. Yet while the damage reports were being compiled, the count of jobs lost and the closure of social programs, there was also the determination to rebuild the capacity of their communities to cope with problems and care for their people in these turbulent times. The Quality of Life Index was conceived in this environment as a community development strategy to monitor the living and working conditions of Ontarians.

## DEFINING QUALITY OF LIFE

Quality of life can be defined as:

*“The product of the interplay among social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect human and social development.”*

Establishing consensus on how best to manage growth and change is the purpose of defining and measuring local quality of life. Each community that seeks to define and measure quality of life will have to build consensus on what is considered important and worth preserving, enhancing or striving for. It should become a regular component of community planning processes.

# QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX



Ontario Social Development Council and Social Planning Network of Ontario, 1997

## QUALITY OF LIFE AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

As social development organizations, our goal is to improve the quality of life in our communities by promoting optimal conditions for human and social development and sustaining them for future generations. The purpose of the Quality of Life Index (QLI) is to provide a tool for community development which can be used to monitor key indicators that encompass the social, health, environmental and economic dimensions of the quality of life in our communities. The QLI can be used to comment frequently on key issues that affect people and contribute to the public debate about how to improve the quality of life in our communities and our province. It is intended to monitor conditions which affect the living and working conditions of people and focus community action on ways to improve health.

## QUALITY OF LIFE AND DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The Quality of Life framework we are using is consistent with the determinants of health framework being used by Health Canada to guide its Population Health Program. The following key determinants of health have been identified:

- Income and social status
- Social support networks
- Employment and working conditions
- Social environments
- Physical environments
- Healthy child development

These conditions have a measurable impact on the health status of people. It follows that many factors which affect health fall outside of the health care system. It is these social, economic and environmental factors which play a critical role in determining the health of the population.

These determinants are consistent with the social development model in their attention to income and social status, employment and working conditions, and physical environment, while adding new dimensions to our understanding of human health. Indicators selected for inclusion in the QLI will provide a way of monitoring the improvement or deterioration of conditions in the community which are known to have an impact on health status.

## **DEVELOPING THE QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX**

This project has been developed by the Ontario Social Development Council (OSDC), working in partnership with the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) and in association with the Centre for Health Promotion at the University of Toronto (HP/UT), the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, and the Centre for Applied Sustainability at York University. (See Appendix 1: Partners and Associates)

As social development organizations across Ontario, we have worked with these models, tested them against our own mandates, and found them to be compatible. It is in this spirit that the QLI was conceived and designed to include social, health, environmental and economic indicators in a cross-sectoral framework. We chose to call it the Quality of Life Index as an integrating concept that could be readily understood by the public. We also decided to use a composite index to focus attention on a single, all-inclusive issue - our community quality of life.

A preliminary set of indicators was identified by a working group of Social Planning Councils and the Ontario Social Development Council, organizations with experience and expertise in social research. These indicators, reflecting the social, health, environmental and economic dimensions of the quality of life in our communities, form the composite index that is the QLI.

The following criteria were used for choosing the indicators to be tested:

- ◆ relevant to quality of life
- ◆ time sensitive
- ◆ available on a regular basis (monthly or quarterly)
- ◆ from credible sources

Following field trials to collect data for each of these indicators, twelve were ultimately selected for inclusion in the Quality of Life Index. The partners in this project are all using the same set of “core indicators” to calculate the Quality of Life Index provincially and in local communities. In this way, we can compare our progress at the provincial and local levels across Ontario.

# QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS

## SOCIAL

Social assistance  
Children in care  
Social housing

## HEALTH

Low birth weight babies  
Elderly long term care  
Suicides

## ECONOMY

# Unemployed  
# Working  
Bankruptcies

## ENVIRONMENT

Air quality  
Environmental spills  
Blue box recycling

Ontario Social Development Council & Social Planning Network of Ontario, September, 1997

## LITERATURE REVIEW

An extensive literature review was conducted to learn from the knowledge and experience of others. The Quality of Life Index (QLI) is using a cross-sectoral model encompassing social, health, economic and environmental measures. Consequently, our review of the literature has spanned quality of life, human and social development, social indicators, health promotion, determinants of health, population health, and sustainable development. We have integrated these concepts into our own model, the Quality of Life Index.

Lessons learned from the literature:

- \* The overall level of health attained by Canadians is an important measure of the success of our society. Good health enables individuals to lead productive and fulfilling lives. For the country as a whole, a high level of health contributes to increased prosperity and overall social stability.
- \* Our overall high standard of health is not shared equally by all sectors in Canadian society. There are differences in health status by age, sex, level of income, education, and geographic area. The rich are healthier than the middle class, who are in turn healthier than the poor. The well-educated are healthier than the less educated, and the employed are healthier than the unemployed (Health Canada, 1996).
- \* Quality of life provides a conceptual framework, consistent with sustainable human development and determinants of health, for the interdependence of social, health, economic and environmental conditions in communities.
- \* A composite index including key indicators of social, health, economic and environmental conditions can contribute to progress toward improving our quality of life and becoming a more sustainable society.
- \* The QLI should have the capability to be future oriented and predict the direction of trends.
- \* Local development allows us to create the conditions that will enable citizens to gain more control over their quality of life.
- \* If the QLI is to have broad public credibility, it must be careful to include both positive and negative measures to provide a balanced perspective on quality of life.
- \* By creating a summary "quality of life" index, some type of standardization would emerge that would enable people to compare local outcomes across the country.
- \* A core set of indicators is needed for comparative reporting by municipalities.
- \* Criteria for selecting a final set of indicators must be clearly stated.



- \* Communities must be involved in the selection and analysis of indicators.
- \* A quality of life/sustainability report should evaluate whether the indicator results are showing progress towards or away from desirable goals. It should also suggest how or whether the indicators could be improved, and may contain recommendations about the kinds of policies or programs that are needed to make progress towards the community's goals.
- \* Assessment of indicator performance should be carried out periodically.

The complete literature review is contained in a companion document, “Quality of Life Index Project: Literature Review” available from the Ontario Social Development Council.

## CALCULATING THE QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX

The following indicators are included in the Quality of Life Index:

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <u>SOCIAL:</u>        | Children in care of Children's Aid Societies<br>Social assistance recipients<br>Public housing waiting lists |
| <u>HEALTH:</u>        | Low birth weight babies<br>Elderly waiting for placement in long term care facilities<br>Suicide rates       |
| <u>ECONOMIC:</u>      | Number of people unemployed<br>Number of people working<br>Bankruptcies (individual and business)            |
| <u>ENVIRONMENTAL:</u> | Hours of poor air quality<br>Environmental spills<br>Tonnes diverted from landfill to blue boxes             |

We have collected data from provincial sources for each of these indicators, using the base year of 1990 and the most currently available statistics, though there are variations for some indicators in the availability of data for these years. The Summary of QLI Indicators report provides more details.

### *Calculating the Index*

In order to calculate one number - the Quality of Life Index - out of a number of indicators, we developed a method of calculation which is described here and illustrated in the following table:

- The QLI is pegged at 100 in the base year.
- Twelve indicators are included in the Index, each assigned a value of 8.33 for the base year.
- Each indicator is considered of equal value in the QLI. No weighting factors are used at this time.
- We took into account the growth in population since 1990 by converting the data for each indicator into a rate per 10,000 population.
- Changes in indicators are calculated based on % increase or decrease from the rate in the base year.
- The impact of changes has either a positive or negative impact on the quality of life. This is factored into the calculation of the index.

The value of the QLI is calculated for 1990 (base year), September, 1997 and May, 1998.

## ***CALCULATING THE QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX***

| <b>INDICATORS</b>                       | <b>BASE RATE/10,000</b> | <b>BASE QLI VALUE</b> | <b>CURRENT RATE/10,000</b> | <b>% CHANGE</b>    | <b>QLI IMPACT</b> | <b>SEPT. '97 QLI VALUE</b> | <b>CURRENT QLI VALUE</b> |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i><b>Social Indicators:</b></i>        |                         |                       |                            |                    |                   |                            |                          |
| 1: Social Assistance Beneficiaries      | 780                     | 83                    | 951                        | 22%+               | Neg.              | 5.8                        | 6.5                      |
| 2: Child Welfare Admissions To Care     | 8.4                     | 83                    | 9.6                        | 14.3%+             | Neg.              | 7.8                        | 7.1                      |
| 3: Public Housing Waiting Lists         | 40                      | 83                    | 64                         | 60%+               | Neg.              | 4.8                        | 3.3                      |
| <i><b>Economic Indicators:</b></i>      |                         |                       |                            |                    |                   |                            |                          |
| 4: Labour Force# Working                | 5,053                   | 83                    | 4840                       | 4.2% <sub>σ</sub>  | Neg.              | 7.8                        | 8                        |
| 5: Labour Force# Unemployed             | 339                     | 83                    | 375                        | 10.6%+             | Neg.              | 5.5                        | 7.4                      |
| 6: # of Bankruptcies Reported           | 19                      | 83                    | 326                        | 71.6%+             | Neg.              | 3.1                        | 2.4                      |
| <i><b>Health Indicators:</b></i>        |                         |                       |                            |                    |                   |                            |                          |
| 7: # Suicide Deaths                     | 0.95                    | 83                    | 0.92                       | 3.2% <sub>σ</sub>  | Pos.              | 8.6                        | 8.6                      |
| 8: Elderly Long Term Care Waiting List  | 13                      | 83                    | 16                         | 23% <sub>σ</sub>   | Neg.              | 7.7                        | 6.4                      |
| 9: # Low Birth Weight Babies            | 7.4                     | 83                    | 8.8                        | 18.9%+             | Neg.              | 6.7                        | 6.7                      |
| <i><b>Environmental Indicators:</b></i> |                         |                       |                            |                    |                   |                            |                          |
| 10: # Hours Moderate/Poor Air Quality   | 162                     | 83                    | 10.5                       | 35.2% <sub>σ</sub> | Pos.              | 10                         | 11.2                     |
| 11: # Spills                            | 5.5                     | 83                    | 3.8                        | 30.9% <sub>σ</sub> | Pos.              | 9.1                        | 10.9                     |
| 12: Tonnes Diverted to Blue Boxes       | 340                     | 83                    | 476                        | 40%+               | Pos.              | 10.3                       | 11.6                     |
| <b>QLI COMPOSITE INDEX</b>              |                         | <b>100</b>            |                            |                    |                   | <b>87.2</b>                | <b>90.1</b>              |

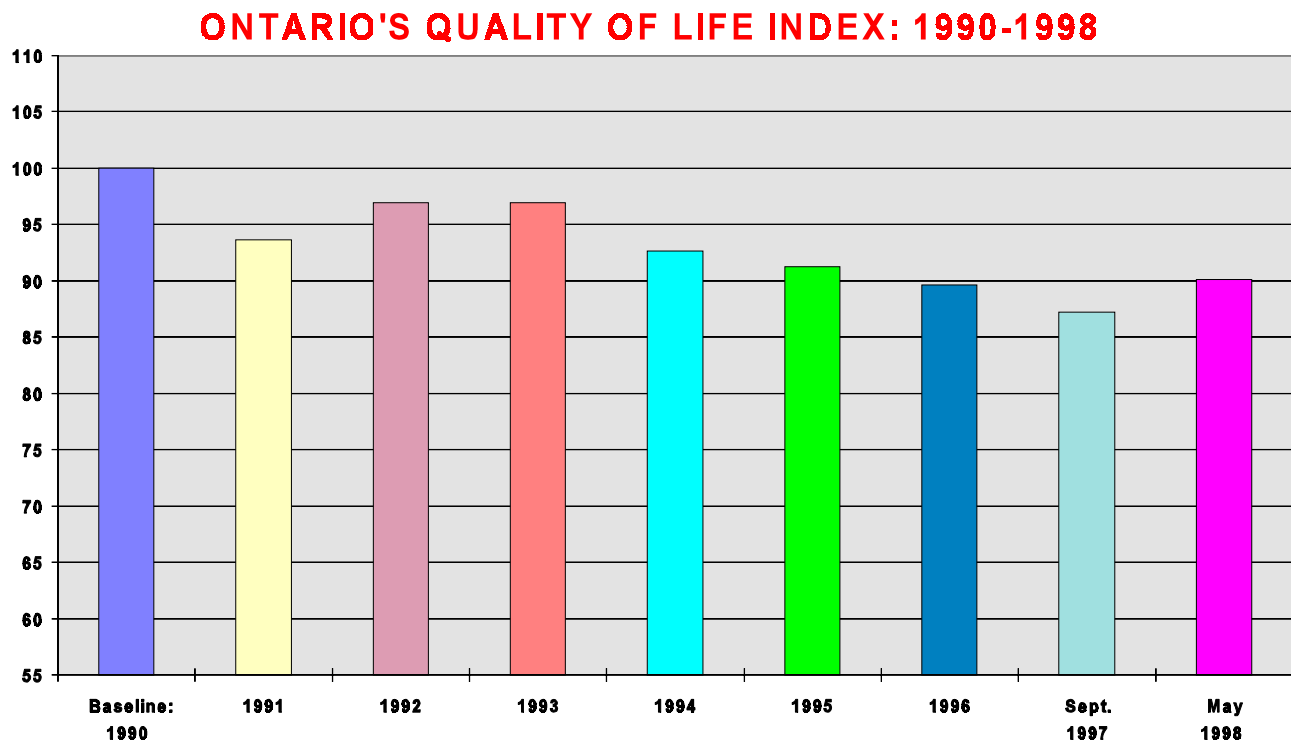
### ***Establishing the Base Year***

We've chosen 100 as the value of the QLI in the base year because it would be easy for the public to understand. The data for each indicator was collected for 1990. Where data was not available for that year, the first year in which data was collected becomes the base year. Changes in indicators are calculated based on the percentage increase or decrease from this base.

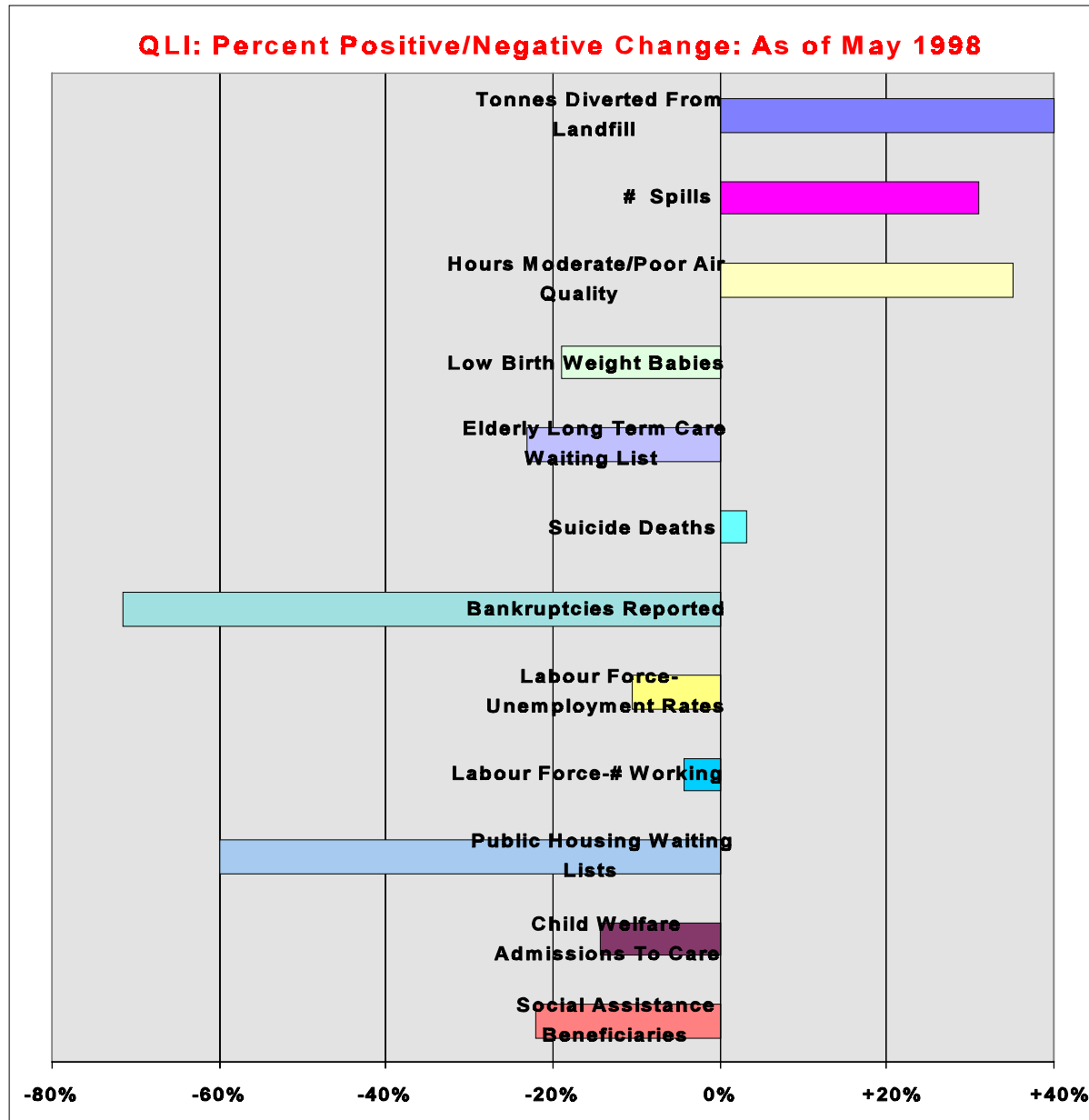
## THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN ONTARIO

Using data we have collected for each indicator from 1990 to the most current year available, we have calculated the Quality of Life Index from 1990 to Spring, 1998. Based on these calculations, the quality of life has declined steadily in Ontario since 1990, as illustrated in the following chart. The economic and social indicators have led the decline, with the economic recession/depression in 1991-92, rising social problems, and a badly frayed social safety net.

The recent upturn in the QLI since 1997 is driven by a strong showing by the environmental indicators and improvements in labour force participation. More people are working and fewer are unemployed. However, the social indicators bring mixed messages. We have fewer social assistance beneficiaries, but longer waiting lists for public housing and long term care, as well as children admitted to care by child welfare authorities.



It is also important to consider how each indicator has changed since 1990. In order to look at the trends for each indicator in the QLI, we take the % change from the chart and put it onto a graph for easy reading. This allows us to make more detailed comparisons about the performance of each indicator. This will shed more light on areas where we are making progress and highlight those where we are experiencing setbacks. The following chart illustrates the percentage of change for each indicator. Closer examination of these changes indicates progress in some areas but setbacks in others. The Summary of Indicators Report discusses the limitations of each indicator and identifies some of the complex issues involved.



## PROGRESS AND SETBACKS

**Social Assistance Beneficiaries** - The data shows recent improvements, since the number of social assistance beneficiaries is declining. This is partly the result of major changes in social assistance, including restrictions in eligibility which have forced many off of welfare. Some have found low-wage jobs in an improved economic climate. Others have been forced into shelters or onto the street. Though fewer people living in poverty are collecting social assistance benefits, there are a growing number of working poor.

**Child Welfare Admissions to Care** - More children are being admitted to the care of child welfare authorities, often due in part to economic hardship endured by their families. During the same period, funds for children's aid societies have been cut by millions of dollars over the past several years.

**Public Housing Waiting Lists** - More and more people are on waiting lists for public housing. They are driven by rising market rents, stagnant pay cheques and lower welfare cheques. Social housing stock has been frozen since the election of the Harris government in 1995. Much of the stock of public housing is in need of improvement. With the downloading of responsibility for public housing to municipalities, and a sizable cut in grants from the province, the further decline in public housing stock is anticipated. There is no new public housing being built to cope with rising demand.

**Labour Force # Working** - There is some good news on the economic front. Ontario's economy is growing at a healthy rate of 3.8%, which is "booming" by media standards. There are more people entering the labour force, after a major drop in 1992, and a slow recovery. While there are more jobs, many are low-wage, with no benefits, and often part-time. This is the labour force which people are entering from the social assistance system.

**Labour Force # Unemployed** - The number of unemployed people is on the decline, after peaking in March, 1997. This is good news for people who have been looking for work. Some will find low wage jobs which offer little hope of elevating them out of poverty.

**Bankruptcies** - The number of personal and business bankruptcies has receded from record levels in 1996. But there has been a steep rise compared with the pre-recession year 1990. This is a volatile indicator which reflects the economic conditions in the 1990s.

**Elderly Waiting for Long Term Care** - There are more elderly people waiting for placements in long term care facilities than there were in 1997. This is a growing problem, driven by cuts to health care and social housing. The commitment of the Ontario government for this sector in its new budget is a recognition of the problem. But the amount of money committed, and the 8 year timespan, are not likely to keep up with rising demand.

**Hours of Moderate to Poor Air Quality** - There has been significant improvement in air quality since, 1990, a trend which continues to 1996. The 1997 data has not yet been released by the Ministry of Environment and Energy. Recent reports from the Ontario Medical Associations express concerns about a crisis in air quality.

**Spills** - There has been a steady decline in the number of spills reported to the provincial government from 1990 to 1997. This is a good news story. There is concern that cutbacks in the public sector may weaken the capacity of the government to monitor and regulate environmental spills.

**Tonnes Diverted to Blue Box Recycling** - There has been a steady increase in the diversion of materials to the Blue Box recycling program during the 1990s. This is reflected in a positive impact on the Quality of Life Index. However, there have been major changes in the roles of municipal governments, with the downloading of responsibilities for recycling and the loss of provincial grants. The future of the Blue Box program is currently being debated by municipalities looking at major budget pressures while facing a broader range of responsibilities for our living conditions.

### ***Observations***

We make several observations about the trends revealed by the Quality of Life Index:

- > There are powerful links between economic and social conditions which must be recognized and addressed together. Will recent improvement in the economy in 1997 transfer to social gains?
  
- > The number of people working has increased marginally over the period, after a steep drop in the early '90s. But the growth in the labour market has not kept pace with population growth. Many of the new jobs created are part-time, low wage jobs with no benefits, which have replaced better jobs lost due to the economic recession and government downsizing.
  
- > Health and social indicators provide warning signs that there are problems of both an immediate and long term nature which are worsening and require attention.
  
- > Though we can celebrate some progress on environmental issues, we cannot be complacent that these gains will be sustained. How will the current economic cycle affect the environment?

### **ISSUES ARISING FROM THE QLI**

*\* Problems with data access and availability, resulting in lack of information about key indicators.*

**Low birth weight babies** - The data for low birth weight babies which we reported in 1997 was not accurate due to problems with the information system used by the Bureau of Vital Statistics in the Ontario Government. The result was that the number of low birth weight babies was over-reported. The data that was available was only as recent as 1995. We are now involved in a process to get the corrected data. But it is not available for this report. We also explored alternative sources of the data, such as the Canadian Institute for Health Information, which has

current and accurate information reported directly from hospitals. However, a hefty fee is required to access the data. Because low birth weight babies are a concern as a matter of public health, the absence of current and accurate data is hard to understand.

**Air quality** - The number of sites for monitoring air quality has been reduced from over 34 to only 27 in 1997, due to cuts in public sector funding. This leaves many communities out of range of a monitoring site and without information about their local air quality. The trend in the sector to deregulation and voluntary compliance with environmental standards leaves the door open for declining air quality and inadequate tools to measure it. Since there is no local data for some communities, it raises the question of finding an alternative environmental indicator, such as water quality for use in the QLI.

**Labour force participation** - Statistics Canada conducts a monthly survey of labour force participation using a small sample of respondents in 25 Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) across Canada. The results are assumed to represent the most current data for the number of people who are employed and unemployed. The widely reported unemployment rate is based on this survey. The problem arises when local groups want to know about employment in their communities. There is no local data from these surveys. CMAs are defined by StatCan in a way which lumps together many cities and regions, without provision for breaking out the data for municipalities. The size of the local survey samples would be too small to be useable. Even large cities like Toronto are lumped into an even larger CMA. Suburban regions like Peel and Halton are included with neighbouring cities in CMAs. Consequently, there are serious limitations in the availability of local data about labour force participation. Municipalities concerned with economic development, do not know how many people are working and unemployed within their jurisdictions. Unemployment is a critical indicator for which data is inadequate as the basis for making social and economic policies at all levels of government.

**Suicides** - Data is not current - latest year available is 1995. The trend in suicides from 1990-95 is very stable, with no significant fluctuations. This is surprising, considering the economic upheavals of the early 1990s. Local data is small, or even non-existent, making it an unsatisfactory indicator for the QLI. There are problems with reporting that lead to speculation that the unofficial rate of suicide deaths is higher than the reported rate. We plan to replace this indicator in our next report in the Fall of 1998.

**Child Welfare Admissions to Care** - Data from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) is suspect because of inadequate reporting from local agencies through area offices. Significant discrepancies have emerged in data collected directly from the local CASs by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS). Problems with information systems for children's services are long standing. New initiatives have been announced to develop an information system for child welfare which will produce accurate and timely information. Recent announcements in the Ontario budget of an infusion of money into the sector is good news. It is hoped that these funds will be used for new staff to cope with rising caseloads.

**Public Housing Waiting Lists** - The most current data available is for 1997. The downloading of responsibility for all forms of social housing to municipalities has created major changes in this field. It is expected that waiting lists for all forms of social housing (public, non-profit,



municipal, co-ops, rent-geared-to-income) will be integrated by next year. This will mean that more comprehensive information will be available about the need for social housing in many communities.

*\* Quarterly updates have been very difficult.*

We had planned quarterly updates, but have been unable to keep to this schedule. Data for some indicators is not current. There is also a serious time lag before data is released. We'll have to report twice a year.

*\* Costs of data*

Fees for reports on air quality, low birth weight, blue box, and suicide could become barriers to access as governments intent on cost recovery neglect public access to information. Information systems are not designed to provide basic information in response to public requests. Electronic access to information would make a big difference in access to information, by e-mail and websites. It would eliminate the costs of printing, photocopying and mailing, traditional barriers to access. The tools of the information age should increase access to public information.

*\* Methodological problems affecting local access to data have arisen.*

Labour force sample sizes and CMA boundaries are not coterminous or comprehensive. Air quality monitoring has been reduced, leaving many areas of the province uncovered. Long term care placement boundaries are based on "catchment areas" which do not correspond with real geo-political boundaries, i.e. municipalities. This raises a major obstacle to coordination of community-based health services involving two levels of government. Suicide data is too small to be meaningful; problems with not reporting sudden deaths as suicides results in unreliable data.

*\* Downloading is affecting indicators and reporting.*

The downloading of responsibilities to the municipalities from the province affects several QLI indicators, including Blue Box recycling, social housing, and social assistance. This raises serious questions about who will be collecting the data and what capacity municipalities will have to maintain information systems for these purposes.

*\* Urban and rural variations*

Differences in the availability of data have emerged in air quality and labour force participation, raising questions about how flexible the QLI should be in adapting to local situations without compromising the comparability of a common data set used by all communities.

*\* Context for QLI*

While the QLI seems to be generally accurate in assessing overall quality of life, there are

limitations in describing the plight of disadvantaged people in our society. Reports of Ontario's "booming economy" masks growing disparities, and people left out of the economic recovery. Other indicators, such as real income, poverty rates, and income disparities provide important information about our quality of life, but are reported much less frequently. We are planning to add a section on the current context for our report in the Fall of 1998.

### *Access to Information*

One of the findings of this project relates to the difficulty experienced in obtaining information about QLI indicators from public institutions, governments and government-funded non-profit organizations with provincial responsibilities for major program areas in health, social services, the environment, the economy and housing. In a number of cases, there was perceived resistance to providing the requested information.

In other instances, it is clear that the information is either not collected, is not collected uniformly across the province, or is not coordinated or gathered together from local communities by anyone. Lack of current data from health units, for example, in spite of their legislative mandates to protect and promote health, suggests the erosion of the capacity of public institutions to fulfill their roles and functions. Frequently, non-profit organizations are being asked to pay fees to provincial ministries to provide required data.

It may be speculated that there are fewer resources and staff available in these organizations to collect, organize, and distribute this information as a result of the significant reductions in Ontario's public spending in the 1990s. The bottom line is that many publicly funded organizations do not have the information technology or information systems necessary to give them the capability of answering basic questions about the number of people served or the range of services provided. This raises serious questions.

How can public institutions manage programs for which they are responsible and conduct the essential planning and evaluation activities necessary to meet a minimal standard of public accountability?

How can they conform to the Ontario government's oft-stated commitment to increase efficiency and effectiveness through better business practices without the capability to answer these most basic of questions about their activities?

How can policy makers, planners and involved citizens get information they need to participate in democratic exercises such as monitoring the well-being of people and communities and taking action to address social inequities?

Governments don't have current and accurate information about important public issues on which to base policies or actions. As a result, they are always reacting to hot issues, rather than looking ahead. Cutbacks in the public service have also reduced the capacity of governments to measure and monitor key indicators. Where non-government organizations, such as provincial associations, are collecting the data, cuts to social programs have also reduced their capacity to

collect key information. This also results in a reduced capacity to coordinate services, based on current and accurate information.

## **HOW TO USE THE QLI IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

The data which we have collected for the Quality of Life Index have come from provincial sources. Our community partners are also collecting the same data from local sources in their communities to calculate their own QLI. Any community can participate in this exercise by calculating the QLI based on data from local sources. The Methodology Report provides additional background information.

The provincial QLI provides a benchmark of comparison. As more and more communities become involved in calculating and monitoring their own quality of life, we will build up a province wide database based on a common set of indicators which we can all use to monitor our quality of life.

## **REGULAR UPDATES**

We intend to update the data for each indicator on a semi-annual basis and recalculate the QLI. In this way we will be able to identify trends and maintain a current perspective on how our quality of life continues to change in a very dynamic and uncertain environment. These updates will be distributed to groups involved in the Quality of Life Index Project, as well as being posted on the Internet for public access:

**[www.qli-ont.org](http://www.qli-ont.org)**

## **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES**

The key to the success of this project lies in the communications strategy. The research needed to develop the QLI will only be as useful as the ability of OSDC and its partners to communicate to the public about progress toward improving the quality of life for all people in Ontario. We believe that quality of life is a unifying theme that will bring people from diverse backgrounds and interests together into a united effort to improve the quality of life in their communities. It will also contribute to the discourse about public policies to improve the quality of life for Canadians.

The communications strategy will include distribution of the QLI report and its key messages through the print, broadcast and electronic media. It will include community as well as mainstream media. It will create the anticipation to receive updates and future reports which will spur communities into action to address local problems as well as working toward desirable goals.

## CONCLUSION

The quality of community life is changing dramatically as we approach the 21st century and governments at all levels make major changes in public policies. The Quality of Life Index has been developed and tested by social development organizations in Ontario with decades of experience in social research and reporting. It is now being used to monitor and measure changes in key aspects of our quality of life through the publication of a series of reports:

The Quality of Life in Ontario - 1997 (October, 1997)

The Quality of Life in Ontario - Spring 1998 (May, 1998)

The Quality of Life in Ontario - Fall 1998 (to be released in November, 1998)

The Quality of Life Index provides a good picture of changes in living conditions which affect our health and well-being as a society. The value of the QLI as a tool for community development will be increased with more involvement of different sectors in taking action on the results. One of the challenges for OSDC and the SPNO will be to promote the involvement of people from the social, health, economic and environmental sectors to work together to improve the quality of life in our communities.

Report by:

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## APPENDIX 2 - *Quality of Life Index - Papers and Website*

The Quality of Life in Ontario - Spring 1998

The Quality of Life in Ontario - 1997 (disponible en français)

Methodology Report (disponible en français)

Summary of Indicators

Literature Review

Reference List

Annotated Bibliography

*Visit our website for more information:*

**[www.qli-ont.org](http://www.qli-ont.org)**

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