

# LEEP



**Lived Experience  
Expert Panel**

An initiative of Huron Perth Public Health

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# LEEP: The first four years!

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**A Report for Panelists**

March 2024

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Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) thanks all panelists on the Lived Experience Expert Panel (LEEP).

The LEEP is an ongoing initiative of HPPH as part of our health equity approach to public health. This report covers the first four years (2020-2023) of the LEEP. It summarizes the survey questions that were asked and describes how the information provided by the LEEP was used to help shape solutions in Huron Perth.

## What is the LEEP?

The LEEP is a virtual panel of adults aged 18 and older in Huron and Perth who have lived experience of systems and discrimination. They have agreed to share their expertise and insights with HPPH and our community partners.

Examples of systems include social assistance, education and healthcare, and legal systems such as courts, child welfare, the Indian Act, immigration, and others.

Discrimination can be based on ability, age, body size, culture, ethnicity, family status, gender, language, race, religion, sex, social class, socio-economic status, or other social determinants of health.

The LEEP aims to advance health equity by including lived experience expertise in the program planning, policy development, service improvement and decision-making of HPPH and our community partners.

HPPH staff and community partners who want to gather information about a specific topic may submit questions to be asked in a LEEP survey. Both HPPH and community partner organizations asking questions of the LEEP must have an equity-related purpose and a concrete plan to use the information they receive from the LEEP.

## Why do we have the LEEP at HPPH?

The social determinants of health (SDoH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. SDoH are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, play and age, and the wider set of forces and systems that shape daily life. These forces and systems include social norms and the social, political, and economic policies and practices that affect how our society functions.

The LEEP helps HPPH to:

- Develop strategies, policies, programs, and services that aim to prevent and reduce health inequities.
- Deliver programs and services that are inclusive of and responsive to the diversity of Huron Perth communities and residents.
- Collaborate more effectively with community partners to address social and public health challenges.

Everyone in a society is affected by the SDoH. Many of the people who are most impacted by forces and systems need to be regularly asked how or if those systems truly work to improve their lives. Including the expertise and insight that come with lived experiences of systems helps HPPH to understand root causes of the injustices that force people to deal with systems and to shape better solutions in our communities.

LEEP surveys are designed to inform population-based approaches to health equity work. The issues identified help HPPH assign resources and make decisions about health equity efforts in partnership with other community organizations. The LEEP is also one way that HPPH works to meet its requirements under the Ontario Public Health Standards and to realize our vision of optimal health and wellbeing for all.

## Who are the panelists?

Panelists are adults aged 18 years and older from both Huron and Perth Counties. They have a range of lived, living, and learned experiences of systems and discrimination. Panelists agree to receive monthly surveys that ask questions about equity-related topics.

Due to limited outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic, between 2020 and 2023, 59 people participated as panelists in the LEEP. Currently, there are about 30 active panelists. Just over half of current panelists have participated in LEEP since it began in 2020. Panelists range in age from 20 to 62 years. The average age of panelists is 42 years, which is approximately the average age of Huron Perth residents.

Characteristics of panelists:

- 6.9% live in a rural area.
- 13.8% live in a town with NO grocery store.
- 79.3% live in a town with a grocery store.
- 13.7% identify as 2SLGBTQI+
- 71.2% listed as not currently employed.
- 86.2% identify as having a disability.
- 89.6% identify as having experienced discrimination.

## How has LEEP information been used?

When the LEEP started, HPPH planned to send panelists a report at the end of every year that outlined how the information collected from the surveys was used to make change in our communities. Due to HPPH's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, staff were unable to produce annual reports. This is the first report back to the LEEP. We sent a survey to panelists in January 2024 asking them to help us choose the information we focused on for this report.

Following is a list of all the LEEP survey questions that have been asked since the LEEP began in 2020. For each question there is a summary of the responses received and how this information has been used to inform issues, programs, services, advocacy, and action in Huron Perth.

Please see the pages at the end of this report for references and links to documents noted in the report.

# LEEP Survey Summaries: 2020-2023

## Biggest social problem

In January 2020, HPPH asked about the biggest social problem in Huron County. At that time, all panelists were residents of Huron County. Responses received identified homelessness and low income to be the biggest social problems facing our communities. The most common responses were, “lack of safe, affordable housing” and “poverty.” HPPH asked this question to determine which problem(s) people living with low income identified as significant. It was meant to be a “big picture” question that would help frame future survey questions based on LEEP insights into identified community needs. Panelists were also asked to provide feedback about the LEEP survey and process itself, as this was the first LEEP survey question asked.

## Social isolation

HPPH asked about social isolation in March 2020. The aim of this question was to develop strategies to reduce social isolation within our communities. Unfortunately, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that this information wasn't immediately used. However, this survey did gather important insights. The majority of panelists indicated that people experiencing mental health issues, people living with low income, people with disabilities and/or addictions, and people experiencing homelessness are the most socially isolated in their communities. Panelists identified living with low income as the main reason for a person being socially isolated.

## Racism

Following an incident in the US involving the death of a Black man at the hands of police, panelists were asked to rate their perception of racism in their community on a scale of one to 10. Panelists were then asked to explain why they chose that rating. Approaching 10 indicated racism was viewed as a more serious issue. Nearly all responses were above five, and most were higher than seven. Responses touched on perceptions that racism is out in the open, most notably towards Indigenous people. Panelists also revealed that they found racism in our communities makes it challenging for newcomers to feel welcome. HPPH asked this question to help inform the development of the organization's anti-racism strategy. This work was put on hold due to lack of staff capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as of 2024, HPPH has developed a policy, held mandatory staff training, and compiled resources to support anti-racism work.

## Basic income

In August 2020, the United Way Perth Huron's Social Research and Planning Council (SRPC) asked panelists what they thought would happen in Huron and Perth communities if we had Basic Income in Canada. Panelists predicted that Basic Income would result in decreased poverty, increased income security, less stigma based on income, lower food bank use, reduced homelessness, and a better local economy. The SRPC's Income Security sub-committee used the information to support local and national advocacy for Basic Income among other income-based solutions. Since that time, there have been Bills introduced in the Parliament and Senate and many local organizations and groups have endorsed Basic Income. LEEP insights were used to advocate for Basic Income in Huron Perth. To learn more about basic income, read the consensus statement, watch the video and see the links listed in references.

## Mental wellbeing

HPPH asked a question about mental health/mental wellbeing in November 2020. Panelists felt the three most important factors that needed to be in place to support mental wellbeing in our communities are having enough income, safe and affordable places to live, and free accessible health and social services.

HPPH used the results to inform its mental health promotion program planning. It is worth noting that mental health/mental wellbeing has often been identified in other LEEP surveys collected over the past four years as an important issue that needs attention.

## Housing and homelessness

Perth Huron United Way's Social Research and Planning Council (SRPC) asked about housing and homelessness in March of 2021. The intent was to inform the United Way's housing and homelessness strategy, which was being developed at that time. Panelists responded that rent-geared-to-income housing and affordable rentals (one-, two-, and three-bedroom), and homes to buy, including duplexes and townhouses, were needed in their communities. Increases in income security rates (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Canada Pension Plan etc.), higher employment income, mental health/addiction services, rent control, and access to the internet were reported as supports needed for people to stay in their homes. SRPC created an infographic of the survey results that was circulated and posted on the SRPC website. The information also helped in writing a report that informed the development of United Housing, United Way Perth Huron's recently launched housing initiative, United Housing.

## Overlooked issues during the COVID-19 pandemic

In May 2021, HPPH asked questions about the issues that were being overlooked or ignored in our community during the COVID-19 pandemic. All respondents reported that affordable housing was an overlooked issue. Panelists identified homelessness, mental illness/addictions, and food insecurity as the top three most overlooked or ignored issues or problems. HPPH used the information to confirm public health issues of greatest concern for people living with low income during the pandemic. HPPH responded by ensuring that some staff continued working with community partners on the identified issues. Panelists also reported that issues such as elder abuse in long term care, and climate change should be topics of focus moving forward.

## Poverty advocacy

In December 2021, Poverty to Prosperity (P2P), the anti-poverty coalition for Huron County and area asked panelists to consider how poverty impacts their community, and on which issues P2P should focus their advocacy work. Responses included that Basic Income, rent-geared-to-income housing, paying a Living Wage, and mental health/mental wellbeing were the most needed solutions to poverty in Huron Perth. Overwhelmingly, panelists urged P2P to speak directly to decision-makers, including politicians. In addition, panelists suggested P2P deliver education and awareness campaigns using local research and data, partner with neighbouring communities, and join other provincial and national advocacy campaigns. P2P used the information to inform its advocacy strategy. P2P's strategy focuses on Basic Income, housing as a human right, and other income security solutions to poverty including, the Canada Disability Benefit and the Canada Working Age Supplement.

## Household food insecurity

SRPC asked the LEEP about household food insecurity in August 2022. As noted in the survey, food insecurity is not about a lack of food, but rather about not having enough money to buy food. Panelists estimated that between half and two thirds of people in their community were experiencing household food insecurity. The LEEP recommended the following solutions to food insecurity: affordable housing, cost of living increases to income security programs (OW, ODSP, etc.), payment of a living wage in all workplaces, and fixed costs for expenses like childcare and utilities. SRPC used the information to help develop their household food insecurity survey questions and to identify locations where people could access the survey. SRPC distributed the survey in November 2022 and posted the results in May 2023.

## Municipal election priorities

In September 2022, ahead of the municipal election, HPPH and SRPC asked the LEEP about which municipal services are most important for the community. The majority reported that social housing, waste removal and recycling, local road maintenance, ambulance and fire services, childcare, public health, and social services were most important. Most panelists reported that municipal candidates should be asked about affordable housing and mental health services. HPPH and SRPC used the information to inform advocacy work associated with the municipal election. Specifically, LEEP insights informed the questions that were asked of candidates, the content of communications, and identified community priorities. See the SRPC Municipal Election Toolkit for survey results including summaries of the LEEP Housing and Homelessness and Basic Income questions.

## Indigenous reconciliation

In October 2022, the Huron Perth & Area Ontario Health Team (HPA-OHT) asked the LEEP about reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Huron and Perth communities. Ontario Health Teams are the model of healthcare delivery in Ontario and are separate from public health. Panelists reported that residents know very little about the issues facing Indigenous groups in the region. Since some of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action on this topic include changing the way programs and services are designed and delivered, panelists were asked which community programs and services should make change a priority. All respondents said mental health and addictions services should make change a priority. Most respondents also noted children's services, police, schools, health centres and social services should prioritize change. The HPA-OHT used this information to help develop their strategic framework for action on Truth and Reconciliation.

## Parenting programs

Several agencies offer parenting programs and services in our community, including HPPH. In December 2022, HPPH asked the LEEP which parenting supports, programs and services are important in their communities. Almost all respondents stated that healthy growth and development programs, prenatal health, infant feeding, and supporting access to other services were most important. This information was shared and used for planning the content and location of parenting programs in Huron and Perth. It helped to identify priorities and services not currently offered and provided insight into how to improve program delivery.

## Weight stigma and bias

In February 2023, HPPH asked the LEEP about the presence of weight bias, weight stigma, and weight discrimination in Huron Perth, and what could be done about these issues. Nearly 75% of panelists who responded felt that weight discrimination was either very common or somewhat common in our communities. In addition, panelists noted that there is a perception that bias, stigma, and discrimination occur in many different community spaces including, schools, retail, and healthcare settings. HPPH used the information to inform its strategy for challenging weight bias, including where and how to deliver education efforts to reduce weight bias, stigma and discrimination in Huron Perth services and communities.

## Tax-filing strategies

In April 2023, P2P Huron Perth asked the LEEP what stops people from filing their taxes, what would encourage people to file their taxes, and what types of supports are needed to increase tax filing in Huron and Perth. The most common reasons reported for not filing taxes included not being able to afford tax filing services, fear of owing money, and being unsure if there are filing supports available locally.

When asked about a potential plan to have the government automatically file taxes for certain individuals, panelists reported that, while they supported this idea, they worried about system malfunctions. P2P used this information to inform its tax-filing strategy, including volunteer tax clinic locations and services, promoting tax-filing as a poverty reduction strategy, and recruiting volunteers to help file taxes for people living with lower income in Huron Perth.

### **Safe places for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth**

In June of 2023, HPPH and Huron County Library asked the LEEP to estimate how safe and welcoming the community is for 2SLGBTQIA+ people, especially youth. Half of the panelists stated that the community was very or somewhat safe and welcoming, whereas the other half chose not very or not at all safe or welcoming. Despite these differences in opinion, the LEEP indicated the libraries were among the safest locations for the delivery of programs and services. This information informed HPPH's work of supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in our communities to connect and share interests and resources, and to develop plans for outreach, programs, and activities for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. See more about Huron County library programs for youth.

### **Parks and greenspaces**

HPPH asked the LEEP about local parks and greenspaces in July 2023. Panelists reported the top three features they enjoy in a park or greenspace are seating in the shade, water stations and walking trails. The top suggestions for improvement included more trash containers, year-round washroom access, and for spaces to be made more accessible for people with disabilities. HPPH used the results to inform program planning for new and ongoing partnerships with local municipalities, and to increase opportunities for collaboration on health promotion strategies in Huron and Perth.

### **Welcoming newcomers**

In September 2023, the Huron Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) asked about how communities can welcome newcomers, and about barriers that keep newcomers from integrating into their new community. Panelists identified that there is a lack of safe and affordable housing for newcomers, and that newcomers need more help to connect to services (such as healthcare, childcare, school, income supports, emergency services). Panelists also indicated that there was some interest in communities to welcome newcomers by listening and asking questions, creating welcoming spaces and supporting local businesses run by newcomers. LIP used this information to learn about perceived attitudes toward newcomers. It will be included in a research report in 2024 about newcomers' experiences of living, working, and studying in Huron Perth.

### **Intimate partner violence awareness**

Violence against women service providers – the Emily Murphy Centre, Huron Women's Shelter, and Optimism Place – collaborated in November 2023 to ask the LEEP about Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in our communities. Most panelists reported IPV is very common or somewhat common in their community. Information collected included which services were viewed as most critical, and which services panelists felt needed to be made more available. Most panelists reported feeling that their community should declare IPV an epidemic. Service providers will use the information gathered to plan a communication strategy for new programs and services being developed in Huron Perth for sexual assault survivors.



## How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the LEEP?

It is important to note that, because the LEEP began in 2020, most of the survey questions were asked during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic likely affected survey response rates and panelist retention. The pandemic significantly limited HPPH's ability to recruit new panelists and our ability to help the LEEP grow as planned. The pandemic also influenced the questions asked, as the LEEP was often used to collect relevant information about COVID-19 topics during the pandemic. Following is a summary of the COVID-19 related survey responses.

### LEEP COVID-19 questions

HPPH asked the LEEP questions at different times throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions were asked about the information that was considered useful and not useful, the perceived impact of pandemic measures on our communities, perceptions of COVID-19 vaccines, trusted information sources about the pandemic and vaccines, and which pandemic supports should be continued after the pandemic. Information collected helped HPPH develop communications to address myths and misconceptions about COVID-19 vaccines and to refine social media messages for the public. Survey responses also helped HPPH realize how isolation was affecting people and communities and to understand some of the barriers to conveying the role of vaccines. Also, as part of a wider consultation with community partners and other organizations, HPPH asked the LEEP to help identify the HPPH programs and services that should be prioritized as we emerged from the acute phase of the pandemic.

## What is happening with the LEEP in 2024?

HPPH is aiming to send out at least eight surveys in 2024 on topics of concern to HPPH and our community partners. In every survey, we also ask the LEEP to suggest topics. As new social concerns and trends emerge in our communities, the LEEP can anticipate being surveyed about them.

Through the ongoing monitoring of the LEEP initiative, panelists have also provided HPPH with feedback about the experience of being on the LEEP. In 2022, we conducted phone interviews with all the panelists we could reach. We sent out a feedback survey in 2023, and in January 2024, we surveyed panelists to help us formulate this report. Panelists will again be receiving calls from HPPH to update information and to provide feedback.

### **The next LEEP survey will be coming soon!**

Finally, the success of the LEEP depends on finding people with expertise who are willing to share it with us to help shape solutions in our communities. Although it's not possible to say how the first four years of LEEP would have been delivered had the COVID-19 pandemic not occurred, we truly appreciate the insight and expertise of the panelists who have been with the LEEP since the beginning and those who joined the LEEP during the pandemic. Thank you for sticking with us!

If you know someone who you think would be a great addition to the LEEP, please encourage them to be in touch with the HPPH LEEP team by emailing [leep@hpph.ca](mailto:leep@hpph.ca).



**WE  
NEED  
YOU!**

**Lived Experience Expert Panel**

**LEEP is a virtual panel of adults (18+) in Huron Perth.** Participants have lived experience\* with one or more of these systems:

- social assistance
- health care
- child welfare
- courts
- education
- other systems that regulate peoples' lives

And/or have experienced **discrimination** based on income, age, race, gender, disability, etc.

\*Lived experience means current or past experience of being involved, helping someone, and/or working in, one or more systems.

**Your experience matters.**

Complete a confidential monthly survey to **help shape solutions in our community.**


**LEEP**   
**Lived Experience  
Expert Panel**

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# HOW LEEP WORKS


## Lived Experience Expert Panel

- 


**1**

**You hear** about the Lived Experience Expert Panel (LEEP).
- 


**2**

**You call, email, or visit** the Health Unit to learn more from us.
- 


**3**

**You decide** to participate in the LEEP and sign the consent form.
- 


**4**

**You share** some general information about yourself.
- 


**5**

**You will get** a survey once a month. You can do the survey online, by phone, in person, or on paper.
- 


**6**

The LEEP project staff read all the answers and write up the common ideas or themes. Your answers are anonymous and confidential.
- 

**7**


**You will get** a summary of what we learned. We will ask you if we understood your answers correctly.
- 

**8**

LEEP project staff will write a report based on all the information from LEEP participants. We will share the report with community partners who want your ideas and opinions.
- 

**9**

**You will get** a flyer from us once a year explaining how we and others used your answers.



Visit [www.hpph.ca/leep](http://www.hpph.ca/leep)  
 Email [leep@hpph.ca](mailto:leep@hpph.ca)  
 Call 1-888-221-2133

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[United Way Perth Huron: Local Living Wage 2023](#)

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