

Community Benefits Framework – Understanding the Need

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Prepared for:



Hamilton

Prepared by:



SPRC

Social Planning and
Research Council of
Hamilton

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that the land on which we work this work is situated upon the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas. This land is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, which was an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek to share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. We further acknowledge that this land is covered by the Between the Lakes Purchase, 1792, between the Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We hope to honour the spirit of the Dish With One Spoon agreement by working to build a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous communities in Hamilton.

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Executive Summary

The *Community Benefits Framework – Understanding the Need* report provides a data-driven foundation to guide Hamilton's development of a Community Benefits Framework (CBF). Using 2021 Census data and other validated sources, this report identifies population groups and labour-market conditions that point to who faces inequitable access to economic opportunities and who stands to benefit most from a community benefits approach.

Purpose

Phase One of the CBF focuses on building a shared understanding of priority communities, the barriers they face, and the opportunities that can be mobilized through development projects, workforce strategies, and community wealth-building initiatives.

Key Insights

Demographic Trends

- Hamilton's population reached **569,353 in 2021**, growing 6% since 2016.
- Racialized residents make up **25% of the population**, with the number tripling over two decades. This is driven by rapidly growing South Asian, Black, and Arab communities.
- Youth (12%) and seniors (18%) represent significant segments with differing labour-market needs.

Immigration & Language

- Immigrants represent **25.9%** of Hamilton's population; **20,145 are recent immigrants (2016–2021)**.
- India, Syria, and the Philippines are the top recent source countries.
- Over **10,000 residents** have no knowledge of English or French; Arabic, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Punjabi are the most common mother tongues among them.

Labour Market Overview

- Hamilton's **participation rate (61.9%)** and **employment rate (54.3%)** trail provincial and national rates, while its **unemployment rate (12.3%)** is higher than Canada's 10.3%.
- Youth unemployment is particularly high at **24.1%**, and seniors also experienced elevated rates during the pandemic.
- Precarious work is widespread:
 - 22% of workers are part-time.
 - 37% of youth hold temporary positions.

- Sectors such as accommodation & food services and retail rely heavily on part-time employees.

Social & Economic Indicators

- One-parent families represent **19.2% of all families**, with 80% led by women - higher than provincial and national averages.
- Nearly **205,000 residents aged 15+** report activity limitations (44%), a rate higher than both Ontario and Canada. Mental-health-related limitations are the most common.
- Income assistance use remains substantial: almost **14,000 Ontario Works** and **22,000 ODSP cases** in the Hamilton CMA, with OW cases rising above pre-pandemic levels.

Economic & Business Landscape

- Hamilton's largest industries are **health care & social assistance, retail trade, and manufacturing**.
- Small businesses dominate the employer landscape: **58%** of firms with employees have **1–4 workers**, and most local businesses fall within small-to-medium size ranges.

Groups Facing the Greatest Barriers

The report identifies several communities that disproportionately experience unemployment, underemployment, and job precarity:

- Racialized residents
- Recent immigrants
- Women-led single-parent families
- Residents with disabilities
- Youth (15–24)

These groups are therefore key priority populations for workforce, training, and hiring commitments within a CBF.

Implications for a Community Benefits Framework

To achieve equitable economic outcomes, Hamilton's CBF should:

- Establish **clear, enforceable workforce targets** tied to development projects.
- Ensure **strong recruitment, training, and wrap-around supports** for priority groups.
- Build partnerships between **educational institutions, labour unions, employers, and community organizations**.

Such strategies can create equitable pathways into stable employment and advance community wealth-building.

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Background

The development of the Community Benefits Framework (CBF) will follow a multi-step approach, beginning with the creation of a prototype framework that the City can pilot upon completion. To support this, Hamilton Community Benefits Network (HCBN) and the City of Hamilton engaged the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton's (SPRC) expertise to help build a data-driven understanding of the communities that stand to benefit most from the CBF.

The goal of this phase is to craft both a compelling narrative and a strong policy foundation for the initiative. SPRC's support is instrumental in describing Hamilton's economic landscape and identifying the populations that would benefit most from a Community Benefits Framework, particularly through a community wealth-building lens.

Phase One – Understanding the Need

This phase focuses on building a shared understanding among City staff, the Community Benefits Protocol Subcommittee, and City Council regarding who would benefit the most from a Community Benefits Framework (CBF), and which communities should be prioritized.

Data source

The primary data source for this report is the 2021 Census conducted by Statistics Canada. The Census provides detailed, high-quality, and reliable information about Canada's population, making it essential for evidence-based decision-making. It is also the only data source that consistently offers reliable information for both small geographic areas and small population groups. The next Census will take place in May 2026, with data releases beginning in 2027.

Although the 2021 Census had a very high response rate (98%), data collection that year was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pandemic-related supports, including the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), influenced income and employment patterns for many households, making some indicators – such as labour market and income data – unusual compared to non-pandemic years.

Community Identification

This section identifies priority communities in Hamilton and any intersections among them, based on who stands to benefit most from a Community Benefits Framework (CBF).

In 2021, Hamilton's population was 569,353, representing a 6.0% increase from 2016. This compares to population growth of 5.8% at the provincial level and 5.2% at the national level.

Age and Gender

For the purposes of this document, the age groupings used are 15-24, 25-64, and 65 and over, reflecting youth, working-age adults, and seniors.

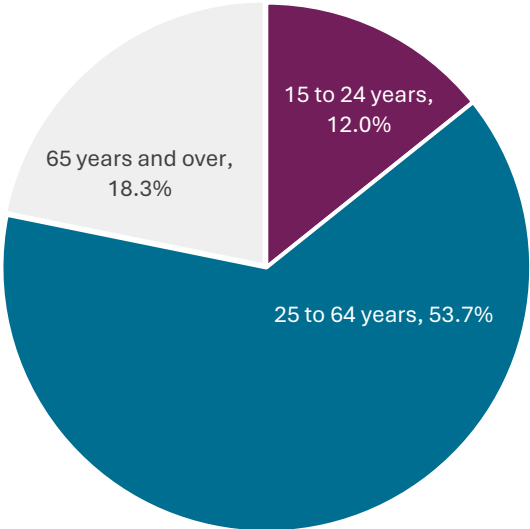
The 15–24 age group numbered 68,200 in 2021, comprising 12% of Hamilton's total population—similar to this age group's share of Ontario's population (11.9%) and Canada's population (11.4%).

The 25–64 age group consisted of 305,635 people, making up 53.7% of Hamilton's population, matching the proportion in Ontario (53.7%) and closely aligning with the Canadian proportion (53.4%).

There were 104,290 residents aged 65 and over, representing 18.3% of Hamilton's population, similar to Ontario (18.5%) and Canada (19%).

Figure 1. Age Groups (15+), Hamilton, 2021

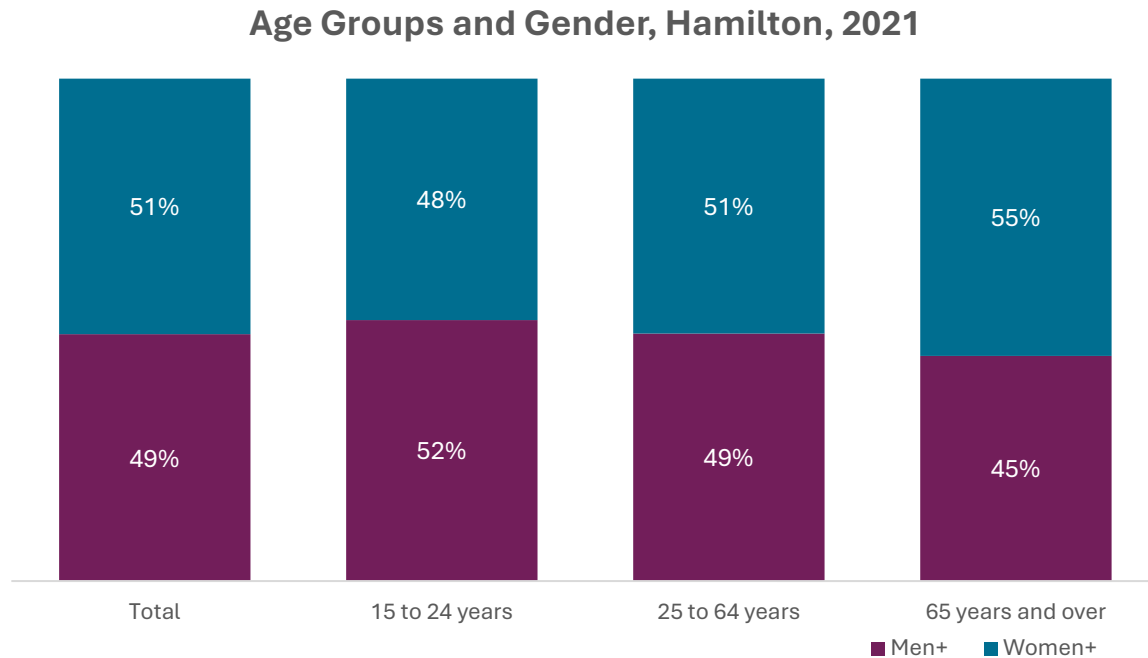
Age Groups (15+), Hamilton, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Within Hamilton’s population overall, distribution is nearly even between men+ and women+. Women+ comprise 51% of the population, mirroring provincial and national patterns. Men+ represent a slightly higher share of the 15–24 age group (52%), while women+ outnumber men+ in the 65 and over age group (55%).

Figure 2. Age Groups and Sex, Hamilton, 2021



Racialized Population

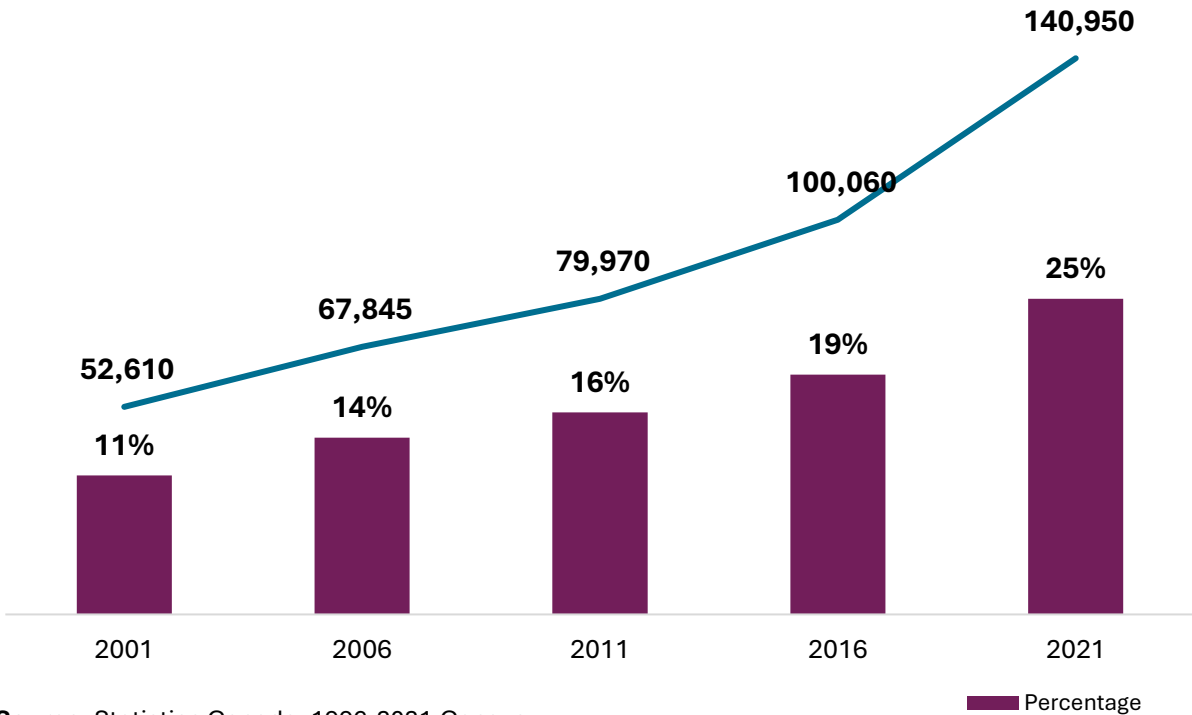
While this section uses the term racialized population or persons, it is based on Census data collected using the visible minority term and are still measured using the detailed “visible minority” variable. Visible minorities include people, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. The visible minority population consists of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, and Japanese, as outlined in the Employment Equity Act. These data, however, do not include Indigenous residents. Visible minority is becoming an outdated term as many communities and cities in Canada, such as Toronto and Vancouver, have more than half of residents identifying with a visible minority group. Statistics Canada recently carried out a consultation on the visible minority concept and is further testing options as a lead-up to the 2026 Census.¹

Hamilton’s racialized population has nearly tripled over the past 20 years, reaching just over 140,000 residents in 2021. Racialized residents now make up 25% of Hamilton’s population. By comparison, 34% of Ontarians and 27% of Canadians identify as belonging to a racialized group.

¹ Statistics Canada. [Report and Draft Recommendations - Results of the Consultative Engagement on the Visible Minority Concept](#), June 14, 2024.

Between 2016 and 2021, Hamilton’s racialized population grew by more than 40,000 people, representing a 41% increase over five years. This rate far exceeds the provincial growth rate of 24% and the national growth rate of 26% during the same period.

Figure 3. Number and percentage of residents who identify with a visible minority group, City of Hamilton



Source: Statistics Canada, 1996-2021 Census

South Asian and Black are Hamilton’s largest racialized groups

South Asian Population Growth in Hamilton

The South Asian population represents just under 35,000 residents in Hamilton. Between 2001 and 2011, the South Asian population grew by 57%, compared to the overall city growth of racialized persons at 52% growth. From 2011 to 2021, the South Asian population grew by 102%, compared to the overall city growth of racialized persons of 76%. In the twenty years from 2001 to 2021, the South Asian population grew by 216%. This compares to an overall racialized population growth between 2001 and 2021 of 167%. South Asian Population growth has consistently outpaced overall city racialized growth in the twenty years between 2001 and 2021.

Black Population Growth in Hamilton

The Black population represents just over 28,000 residents in Hamilton. Between 2001 and 2011, the Black population grew by 54%, a marginal increase over the 52% overall city

growth of racialized persons. From 2011 to 2021, the Black population grew by 76%, which was on par with the overall city growth of racialized persons in the city. In the twenty years from 2001 to 2021, the Black population grew 171%, outpacing the overall racialized growth, which was 167% in this period.

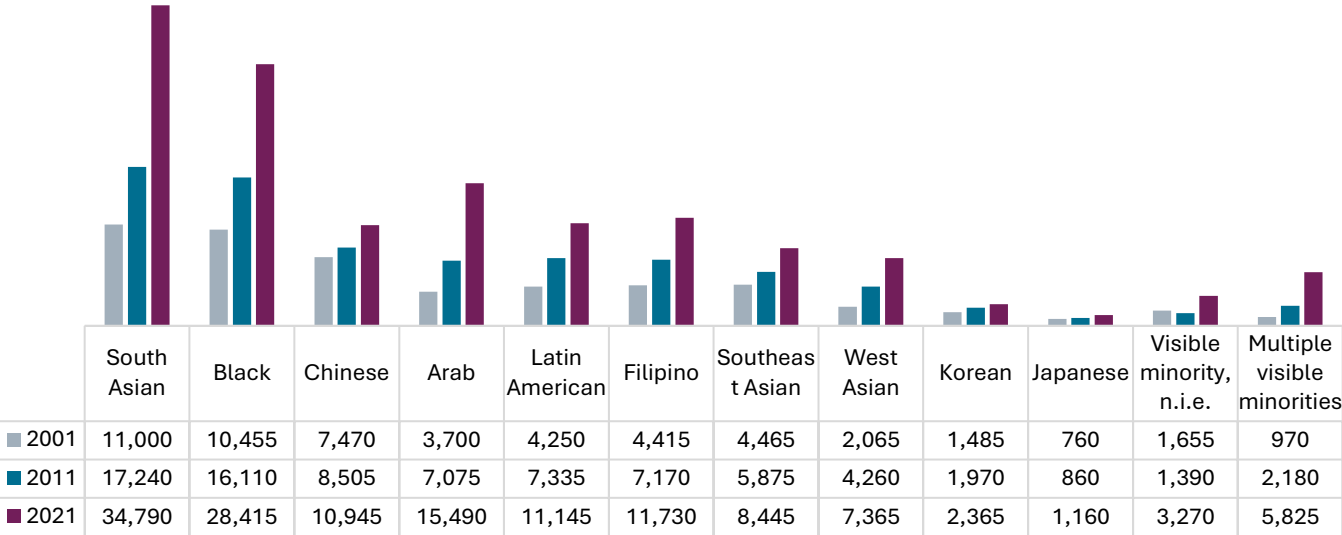
Arab is the fastest-growing racialized group in Hamilton

The Arab population is the fastest growing racialized group, representing 15,490 residents in 2021. Between 2001 and 2011, the Arab population grew by 91%, nearly double the overall growth of 52% for racialized persons in Hamilton. From 2011 to 2021, the Arab population grew by 119%, compared to the overall city growth of racialized persons of 76%. In the twenty years from 2001 to 2021, the Arab population grew 319%. This compares to an overall racialized population growth between 2001 and 2021 of 167%. Arab population growth has consistently outpaced overall city racialized growth in the twenty years between 2001 and 2021.

Slowest Growth Groups

The Chinese and Korean racialized groups had the slowest growth between 2011 and 2021. The Chinese population, representing 10,945 residents in 2021, grew by 29% between 2011 and 2021. Likewise, the Korean population of 2,365 residents in 2021 grew by 20% in the period between 2011 and 2021. Both growth rates are below the overall growth of 52% overall city growth of racialized persons.

Figure 4. Number of persons identifying with specific racialized groups, City of Hamilton, 2001, 2011 and 2021 Censuses



Source: Statistics Canada, Census.

Employment status

According to the 2021 Census, Hamilton had 469,795 individuals aged 15 and over. Of these, 290,990 were in the labour force, resulting in a participation rate of 61.9%. This is slightly lower than the participation rates for Ontario (62.8%) and Canada (63.7%). Hamilton's unemployment rate was 12.3%, similar to Ontario's rate (12.2%) and higher than Canada's (10.3%).

Table 1. Labour Force Status by Age Groups, Hamilton, 2021

Labour force status	Total	15 to 24	25 to 64	65 and over
Total population aged 15 years and over	469,795	67,815	303,405	98,575
In the labour force	290,990	40,080	236,930	13,975
Employed	255,075	30,435	212,555	12,090
Unemployed	35,910	9,650	24,375	1,885
Not in the labour force	178,810	27,735	66,475	84,600
Participation rate (%)	61.9	59.1	78.1	14.2
Employment rate (%)	54.3	44.9	70.1	12.3
Unemployment rate (%)	12.3	24.1	10.3	13.5

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census

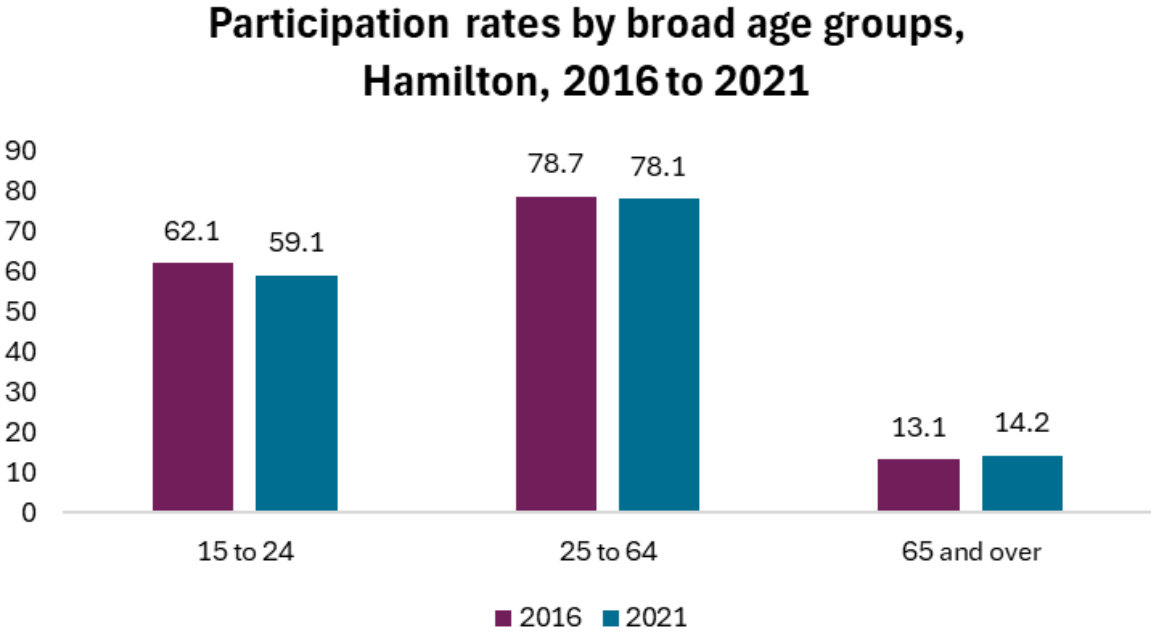
- In the labour force includes both employed and unemployed (actively looking for work).
- Participation rate is the share of the age group in the labour force.
- Employment rate is the share employed of the total age group.
- Unemployment rate is the share unemployed among those in the labour force.

When examining participation rates by age group in 2021:

- Participation was highest among those aged 25 to 64 at 78.1%, a rate very similar to 2016.
- Participation among 15 to 24-year-olds dropped from 62.1% in 2016 to 59.1% in 2021.
- Participation for those 65 and over increased slightly from 13.1% to 14.2%.

Provincial and national patterns reflect similar trends. In Ontario, participation in 2021 was 57.4% for ages 15–24, 79.6% for ages 25–64, and 15.6% for those 65 and over. For Canada, the rates were 60.3%, 80.5%, and 15.8%, respectively.

Figure 5. Labour Force Participation Rates, Hamilton



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

All the age groups experienced an increase in the unemployment rate from 2016 to 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was changed the most for those aged 65 and over, increase by 8.1%. This was followed by the 15 to 24 age group experiencing an increase of 7.7% and 5% for those aged 25 to 64.

All age groups experienced increases in unemployment rates between 2016 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The largest increase occurred among those 65 and over, rising by 8.1 percentage points.
- Youth aged 15 to 24 experienced a 7.7-point increase.
- Adults aged 25 to 64 saw a 5-point increase.

This mirrors patterns across Ontario and Canada. In Ontario, unemployment rose:

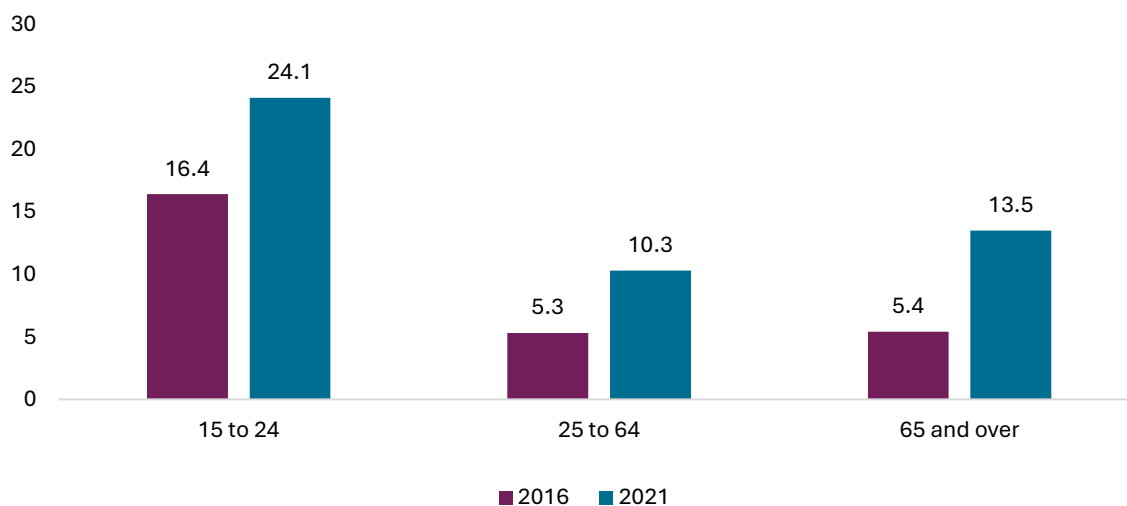
- From 5.1% to 13.4% for those 65+,
- From 17.6% to 25.3% for youth 15–24,
- From 5.8% to 10.1% for adults 25–64.

In Canada, unemployment increased:

- To 13.5% for ages 65+,
- To 19.5% for ages 15–24,
- To 8.6% for ages 25–64.

Figure 6. Unemployment Rates by Broad Age Groups, Hamilton

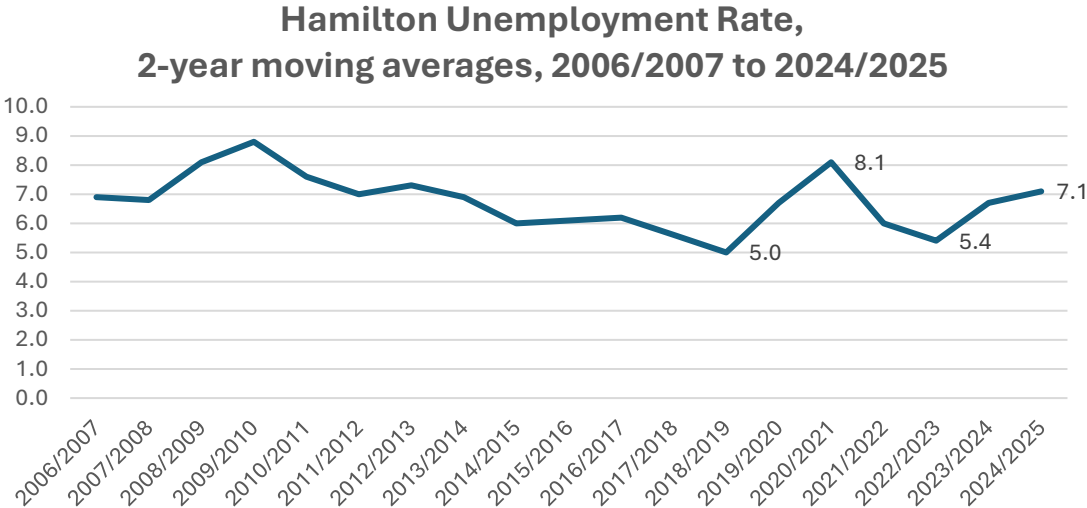
Unemployment Rates by Broad Age Groups, Hamilton, 2016 to 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

When examining long-term unemployment trends, the two-year moving average shows that Hamilton’s unemployment rate was 7.1% in 2024–2025. Over the previous seven periods, the unemployment rate fluctuated significantly due to the pandemic, dropping from 5% in 2018-2019, rising to 8.1% in 2020-2021, falling again to 5.4% in 2022-2023, and increasing over the most recent two periods. This mirrors Ontario’s pattern, where the unemployment rate was 7.3% in 2024-2025.

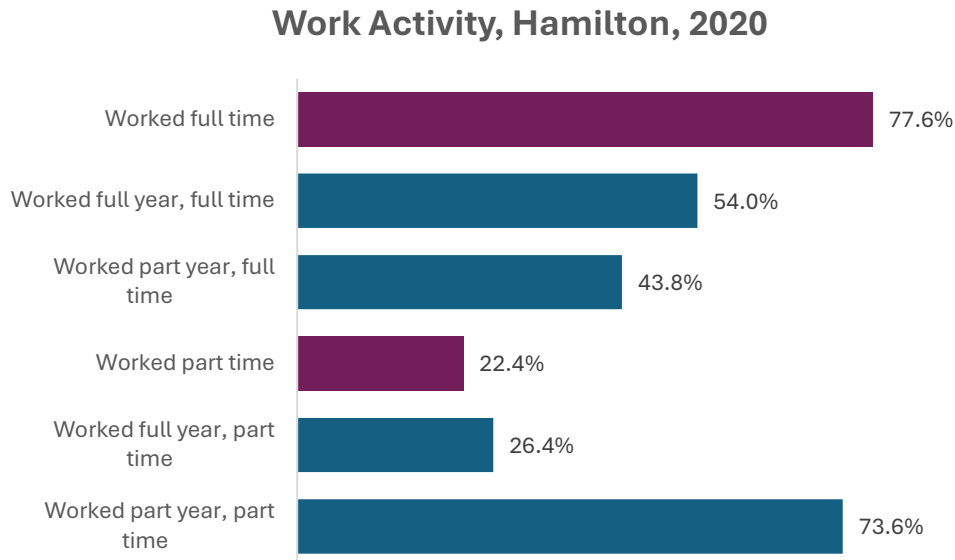
Figure 7. Hamilton Unemployment Rate 2006-2025



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

Full-time and Part-Time Work

For the reference year 2020, 288,220 Hamilton workers reported work activity. Of these, 77.6% worked full-time, while 22.4% worked part-time. Among full-time workers, 69.5% worked full-year, a rate similar to Ontario (69%) and Canada (68%). Among part-time workers, 73.6% worked part-year, which also aligns closely with Ontario (75%) and Canada (74%).

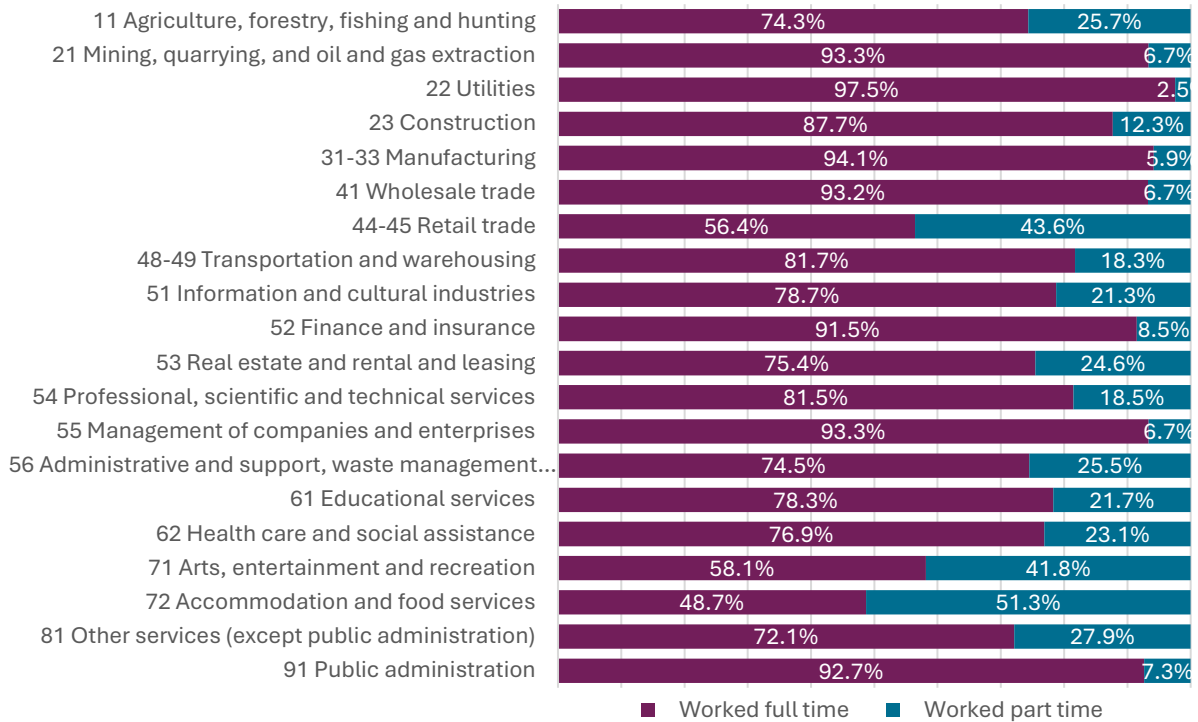
Figure 8. Work Activity, Hamilton, 2020

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Those working in accommodation and food services had the highest percentage of part-time workers (51.3%), followed by retail trade at 43.6% and arts, entertainment and recreation at 41.8%.

Figure 9. Working Full-time vs. Part-time by Industry, Hamilton

Working Full-Time vs. Part-Time by Industry, Hamilton, 2021

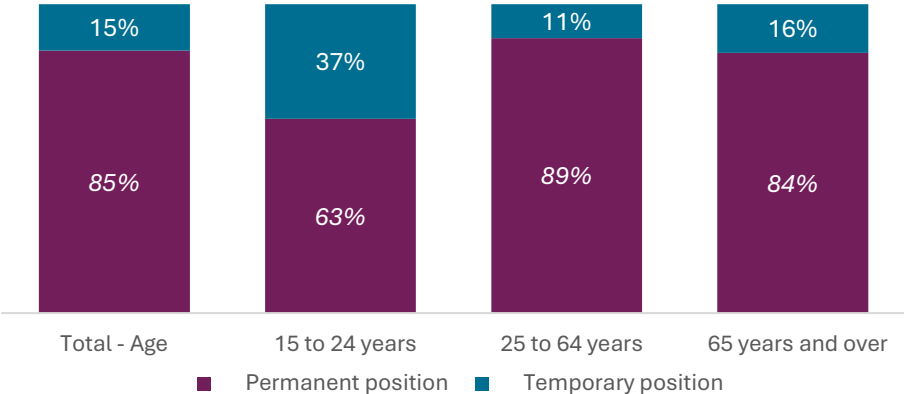


Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

When examining employment precarity, 85% of employees overall held permanent positions. However, among those aged 15–24, 37% worked in temporary roles.

Figure 10. Permanent vs. Temporary Positions, Hamilton

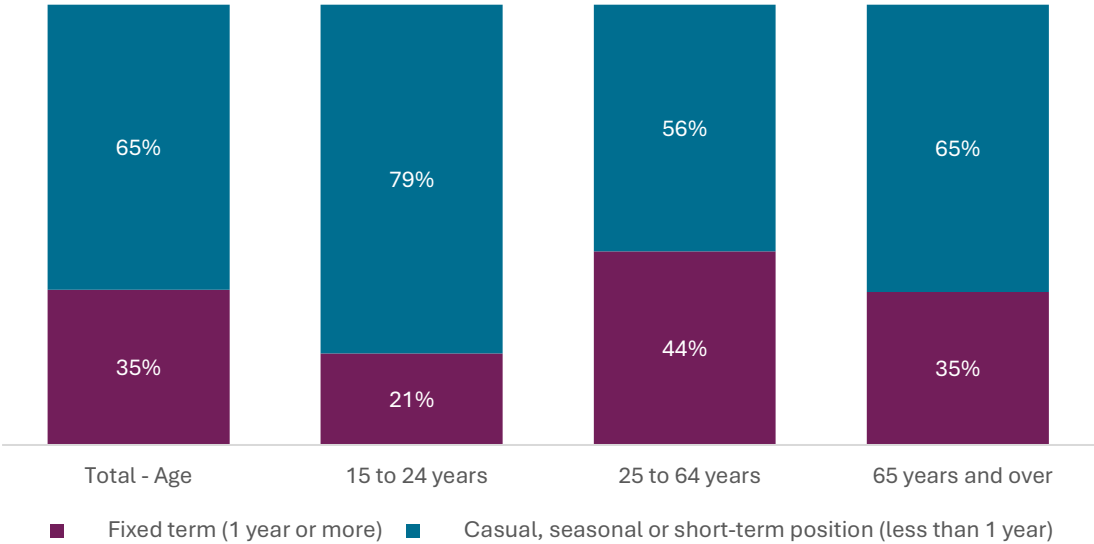
Permanent vs. Temporary Positions, Hamilton, 2020



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Among workers in temporary positions, 65% were in casual, seasonal, or short-term jobs of less than one year. For youth aged 15–24, this proportion was even higher at 79%.

Temporary Positions, Hamilton, 2020

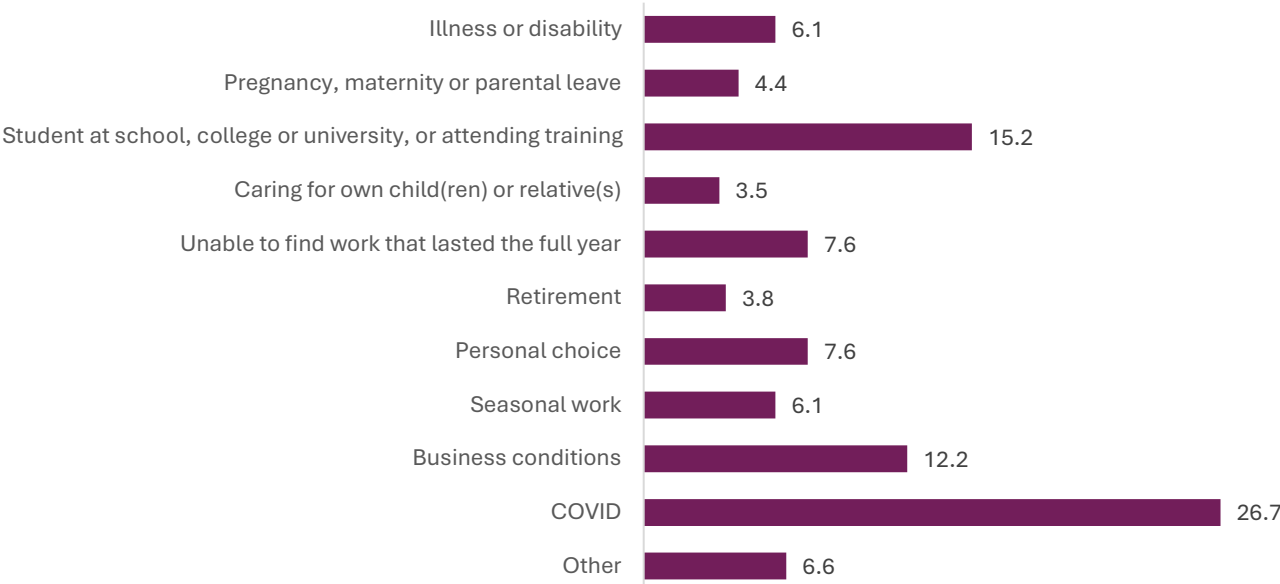


Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

For workers who did not work a full year in 2020, over one-quarter (26.7%) reported COVID-19 as the reason. Other prominent reasons included being a student, illness or disability, seasonal work, and business conditions.

Figure 11. Main reasons people did not work full year, Hamilton

Main reasons people did not work the full year, Hamilton, 2020



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Social Factors:

Family structure

Statistics Canada defines families as people related by blood, marriage, common-law or adoption living in private households. The total number of census families in Hamilton was 157,125 in 2021.

Family structures in Hamilton were distributed as follows:

- Two-parent families (couples with or without children) were the most common, comprising 80% of all families, slightly lower than the Ontario rate (83%) and the Canadian rate (84%).
- Married or common-law couples without children accounted for 50,885 households (37% of all families).
- Couples with children made up 68,780 households (54% of all families).
- One-parent families represented 19.2% of census families (30,135 households), higher than Ontario (17.1%) and Canada (16.4%).
 - Of these one-parent families, 79.6% were led by women, similar to Ontario (79%) and Canada (77%).
- The average family size was 2.9 persons, with families averaging 1.8 children.

Among Hamilton residents aged 15 and over in private households in 2021:

- 54.5% were currently married or living common-law (45.3% married, 9.2% common-law).
- 45.5% were not in a married or common-law union.

Among census families living in Hamilton in 2021, 66.8% were married couples, 14% were common-law couples, and 19.2% were one-parent families. Of the one-parent families, 80% are women-led.

Other household characteristics included:

- 13.2% of adults aged 15+ lived alone—slightly lower than 13.5% in 2016.
 - This compares to 12.3% for Ontario and 14.5% for Canada.
- In total, Hamilton had about 222,805 households, with an average household size of 2.5 people.

Additional household types included:

- Multigenerational households (~3.7%).
- Households with multiple unrelated families or individuals (small but notable proportions).

- About 11.1% of all residents lived alone.

Recent Immigrant (arrived 2016-2021)

Recent immigrants in Hamilton are very diverse coming from all parts of the world and linguistic communities. Their trajectories are also diverse. Some are economic class immigrants, selected for their labour skills and economic contributions to Canada's growth, some are family class immigrants who are sponsored by family members of current settled immigrants in Canada, and some are refugees, fleeing persecution and repression in their home countries.

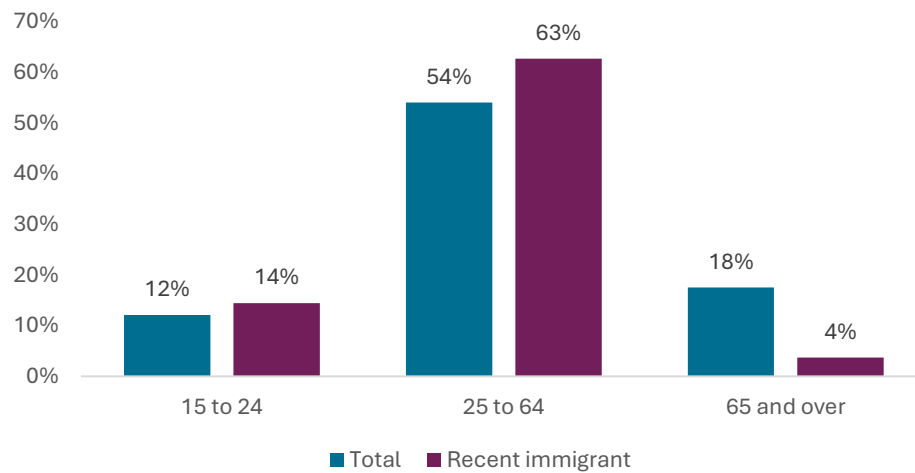
In 2021, Hamilton was home to 145,550 immigrants, representing 25.9% of the city's population. The largest proportion of immigrants (57%) arrived before 2000, while 43% arrived between 2001 and 2021.

Excluded from this data are non-permanent residents as they are not considered immigrants. Non-permanent residents include temporary workers, foreign students, seasonal agricultural workers, and asylum claimants for instance.

Recent immigrants (those who arrived between 2016 and 2021) represent 13.8% of Hamilton's immigrant population and 3.6% of the city's total population. In 2021, Hamilton had 20,145 recent immigrants. This is consistent with broader trends: recent immigrants made up 13.9% of Ontario's immigrant population and 4.2% of its total population, while nationally they accounted for 15.9% of the immigrant population and 3.7% of the overall population.

Among recent immigrants, the median age is 31.6, compared to 40 for Hamilton's overall population. At both the provincial and national levels, the median age for recent immigrants is 32.4.

Population by Age Groups, Hamilton, 2021



Median employment income for recent immigrants was \$28,000 for 2020, compared to \$37,500 for the overall population.

Place of birth

The top three places of birth among immigrants living in Hamilton in 2021 were the United Kingdom, India, and Italy. Among recent immigrants living in Hamilton, they were India, Syria, and the Philippines.

Nationally, the top three places of birth for recent immigrants in 2021 were India, the Philippines, and China, while for Ontario they were India, China, and the Philippines.

Table 2. Top places of birth of recent immigrants, Hamilton, 2016 and 2021

	2016 - Number	2016 - %	2016 - Rank	2021 - Number	2021 - %	2021 - Rank
Recent immigrants (2016: 2011 to 2016 / 2021: 2016 to 2021)	13,150	100	...	20,145	100	...
India	1,005	7.6	4	3,205	15.9	1
Syria	1,245	9.5	1	2,640	13.1	2
Philippines	1,080	8.2	3	1,790	8.9	3
Nigeria	110	0.8	26	915	4.5	4

	2016 - Number	2016 - %	2016 - Rank	2021 - Number	2021 - %	2021 - Rank
Iraq	1,095	8.3	2	905	4.5	5
Pakistan	695	5.3	5	665	3.3	6
United States of America	540	4.1	7	615	3.1	7
China	645	4.9	6	580	2.9	8
Jamaica	310	2.4	9	525	2.6	9
United Kingdom	370	2.8	8	340	1.7	10

The 2021 data show notable shifts in the origins of recent immigrants:

- India rose from 4th to 1st place, increasing from 7.6% to 15.9% of recent immigrants.
- Syria remained a leading source country, representing 13.1% in 2021.
- The Philippines remained 3rd, accounting for 8.9% in 2021.
- Nigeria rose dramatically from 26th to 4th place.
- Iraq, once a top source country, fell from 2nd to 5th.
- The United States, China, Jamaica, and the United Kingdom remained among the top ten but shifted in rank.

This distribution reflects Hamilton's increasingly diverse immigrant population, influenced by global migration patterns, refugee resettlement initiatives, and economic immigration pathways

Of the 16,290 recent immigrants aged 15 and over, 67% were in the labour force, compared to 62% for the total population. However, the unemployment rate for recent immigrants was 13.8%, compared to 12.3% for the total population aged 15 and over. In Ontario, the unemployment rate among recent immigrants was 13.9%, and 11.9% at the national level.

Knowledge of official languages (top 3-5)

Knowledge of official languages refers to whether a person can conduct a conversation in English only, French only, in both English and French, or in neither language. In 2021, 92% of Hamilton's population reported knowledge of English only, 0.1% reported knowledge of

French only, and 5.8% reported knowledge of both official languages. About 2% of Hamilton's population, approximately 10,400 people, had no knowledge of either English or French. For Ontario, 2.4% of the population reported no knowledge of English or French, compared to 1.9% for Canada.

Among those whose mother tongue (the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood) was neither English nor French, the most common non-official languages were Arabic, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Punjabi.

Nationally, the top non-official mother tongues in 2021 were Mandarin, Punjabi, Yue (Cantonese), Spanish, and Arabic. In Ontario, the most common were Mandarin, Punjabi, Yue (Cantonese), Arabic, and Tagalog (Filipino).

Table 3. Mother tongue of those with no knowledge of official languages

Arabic	1,385	14.0%
Italian	930	9.4%
Spanish	915	9.2%
Portuguese	750	7.6%
Punjabi (Panjabi)	685	6.9%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census

Language spoken most often at home

In the 2021 Census, "home language" refers to the language(s) a person speaks most often or on a regular basis at home.

In Hamilton, English was the language most often spoken at home by 87% of residents. Among recent immigrants, 40% primarily spoke English at home. In 2021, there were 2,165 residents who spoke French most often at home.

The top five non-official home languages spoken in Hamilton were Arabic, Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, Punjabi, and Mandarin. Among recent immigrants, the top five were Arabic, Punjabi, Spanish, Gujarati, and Mandarin.

In Ontario, the most common non-official home languages were Mandarin, Punjabi, Yue (Cantonese), Arabic, and Spanish. Nationally, they were Mandarin, Punjabi, Yue (Cantonese), Spanish, and Tagalog (Filipino).

Table 4. Language spoken most often at home, Hamilton, 2021

	Total	Recent Immigrants	Total %	Recent Immigrant %
English	467,080	6,925	86.6%	40.1%
French	2,165	235	0.4%	1.4%
Arabic	8,230	3,190	1.5%	18.5%
Spanish	5,760	655	1.1%	3.8%
Serbo-Croatian	5,090	190	0.9%	1.1%
Punjabi (Panjabi)	4,730	655	0.9%	3.8%
Mandarin	3,785	395	0.7%	2.3%

Disability (activity limitation)

In the Canadian Disability Survey, Statistics Canada explains the social model of disabilities:

The premise of the social model is that disability is the result of the interaction between a person's functional limitations and barriers in the environment, including social and physical barriers that make it harder to function day-to-day. Thus, disability is a social disadvantage that an unsupportive environment imposes on top of an individual's impairment.

Statistics Canada's definition of disability includes anyone who reported being "sometimes", "often" or "always" limited in their daily activities due to a long-term condition or health problem.

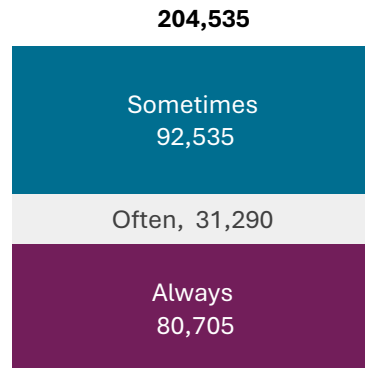
This report uses these definitions to provide a baseline of information on the population of persons with disability in Hamilton.

Using this definition, the 2021 Census found that nearly 205,000 persons aged 15 and over in Hamilton reported activity limitations—representing 44% of the population aged 15 and over. This rate is higher than Ontario (36%) and Canada (40%).

Among Hamilton residents with activity limitations:

- 92,535 reported being limited sometimes (often referred to as "episodic disabilities"),
- nearly 81,000 reported being always limited, and
- just over 31,000 reported being limited often.

Persons reporting activity limitations aged 15+, Hamilton, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Among persons with activity limitations in Hamilton (always, often, and sometimes combined), mental health related limitations were the most common, at 47% of respondents. Other prominent types included:

- Other health conditions (43%),
- Cognitive limitations (35%),
- Physical limitations (37%),
- Seeing limitations (31%), and
- Hearing limitations (21%).

Patterns vary significantly by age group:

Ages 15–24

- Mental-health-related limitations were most common (~70%).
- Cognitive limitations were reported by 39%.
- Seeing limitations were reported by 27%.

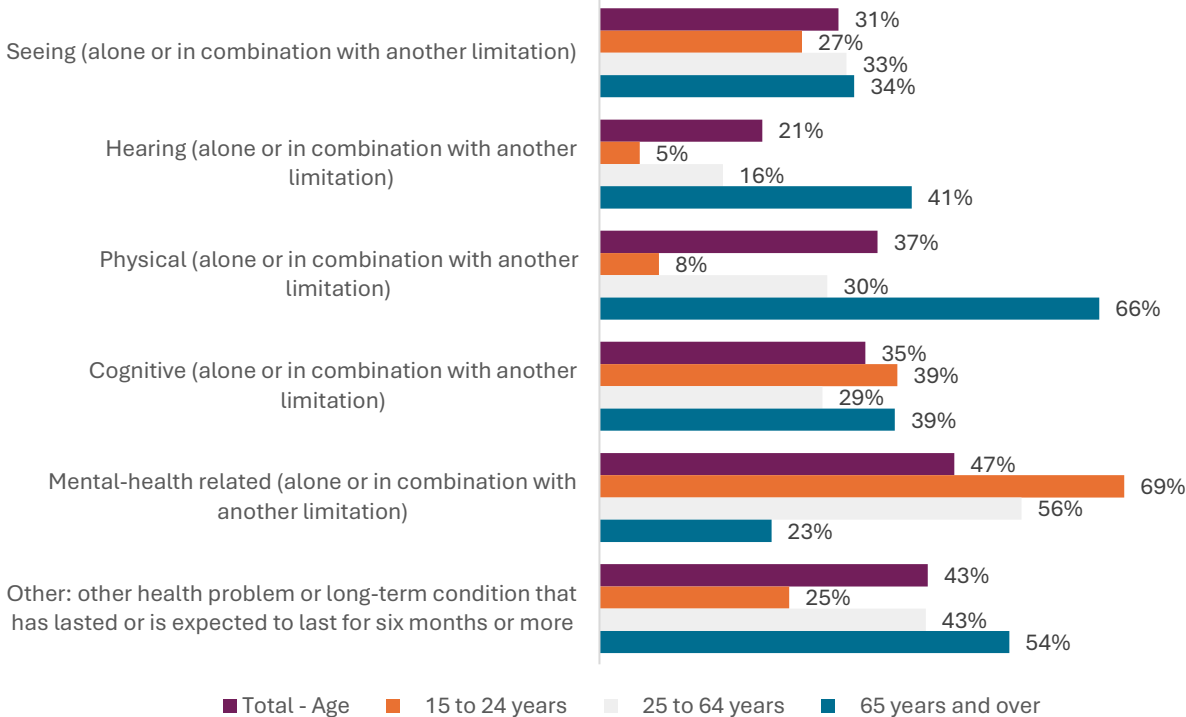
Ages 25–64

- Mental-health-related limitations remained most common (56%).
- Limitations categorized as “Other” were reported by 43%.
- Seeing limitations affected 33%.

Ages 65 and over

- Physical limitations were most common (66%).
- “Other” limitations followed at 54%.
- Hearing limitations were reported by 41%.

Types of Activity Limitation by Age Groups (15 and over), Hamilton, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Income Assistance Program Participation

Ontario Works, ODSP, and other relevant supports

Ontario Works (OW) is a provincial income support program that offers:

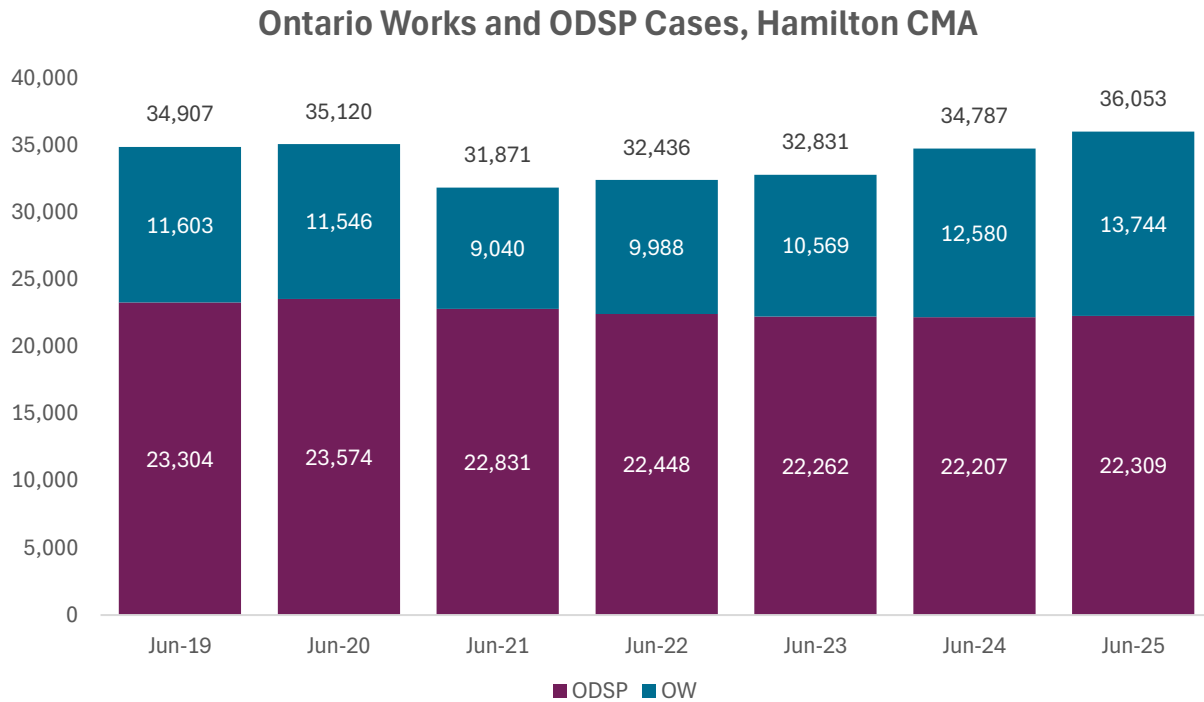
- money to help individuals and eligible family members with living expenses, including food, and rent
- health benefits for individuals and eligible family members
- employment supports to help individuals find and keep a job (such as workshops for resume writing, job counselling, job-specific training, and basic education)

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) provides similar support as Ontario Works for those with a disability.

As of July 2025, maximum monthly ODSP rates for a single person are \$1,408 (\$809 basic needs + \$599 maximum shelter), reflecting a 2.8% inflation-based increase. Ontario Works (OW) rates remain frozen for the seventh consecutive year, with a single person typically receiving up to \$733 monthly.

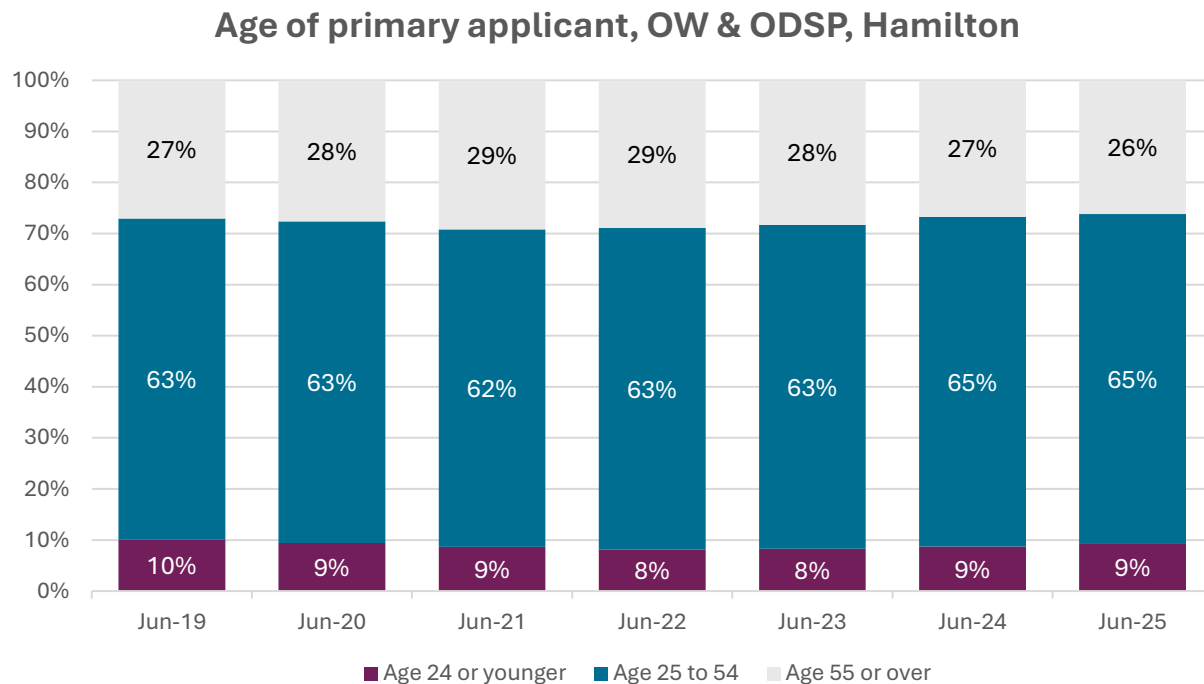
According to recent provincial data, there are just under 14,000 OW cases and over 22,000 ODSP cases in Hamilton. There was a dip in the number of OW cases in 2021, reflecting pandemic supports that would have been available to individuals. OW cases then rose to a higher number of cases in 2025 than in 2019 (pre-pandemic).

Figure 12. Ontario Works and ODSP Cases, Hamilton CMA



Source: Open Government Ontario, Ontario Social Assistance case characteristics by census metropolitan area

When looking at the age of primary applicant for OW and ODSP, about two-thirds are aged 25-54, while over a quarter are aged 55 and over.



Source: Open Government Ontario, Ontario Social Assistance case characteristics by census metropolitan area

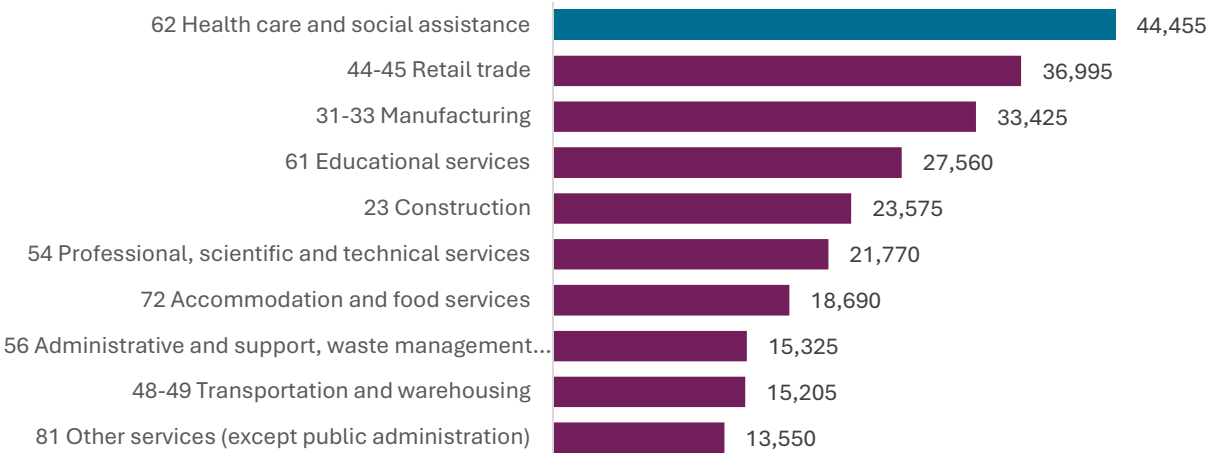
Employment Data

Industry

When examining the number of workers by industry in Hamilton, the largest industry sector is health care and social assistance, followed by retail trade, and manufacturing. At the national level, the top sectors were health care and social assistance, retail trade, and professional, scientific and technical services—a pattern also reflected in Ontario.

Figure 13. Workers by Industry, Hamilton

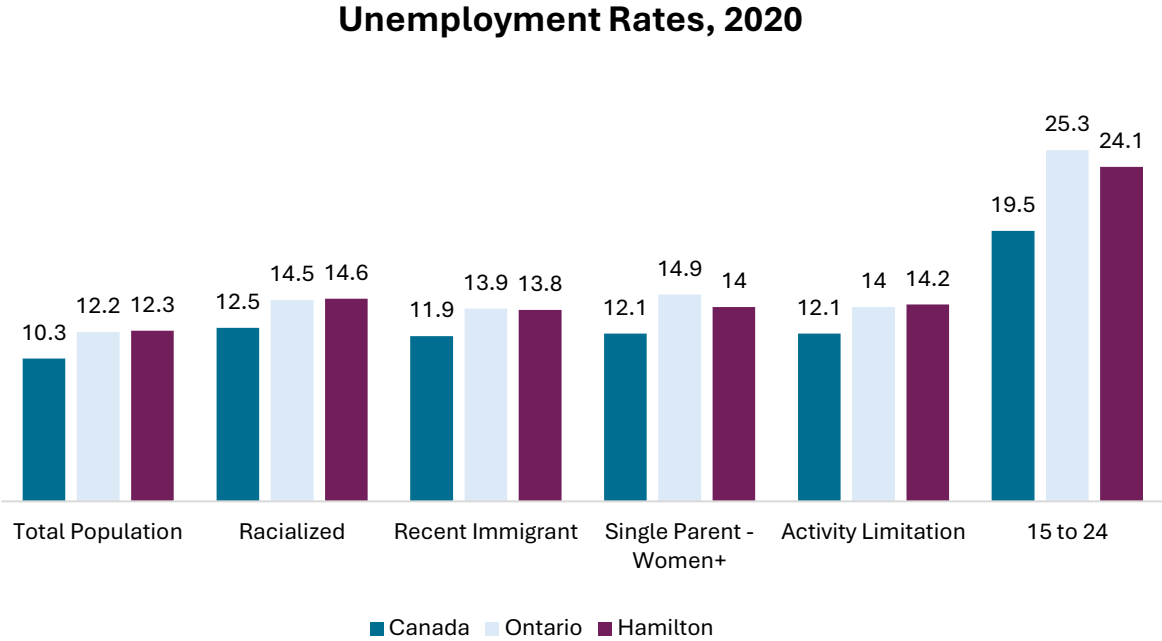
Total Number of Workers by Industry, Hamilton, 2020



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

As reflected in the chart below, identified communities have higher unemployment rates when compared to the overall population in Hamilton. This was also reflected in the Ontario and Canadian rates for these communities, although the Ontario and Hamilton rates were consistently higher than the Canadian rates across all the communities.

Figure 14. Unemployment rates for select groups, 2020



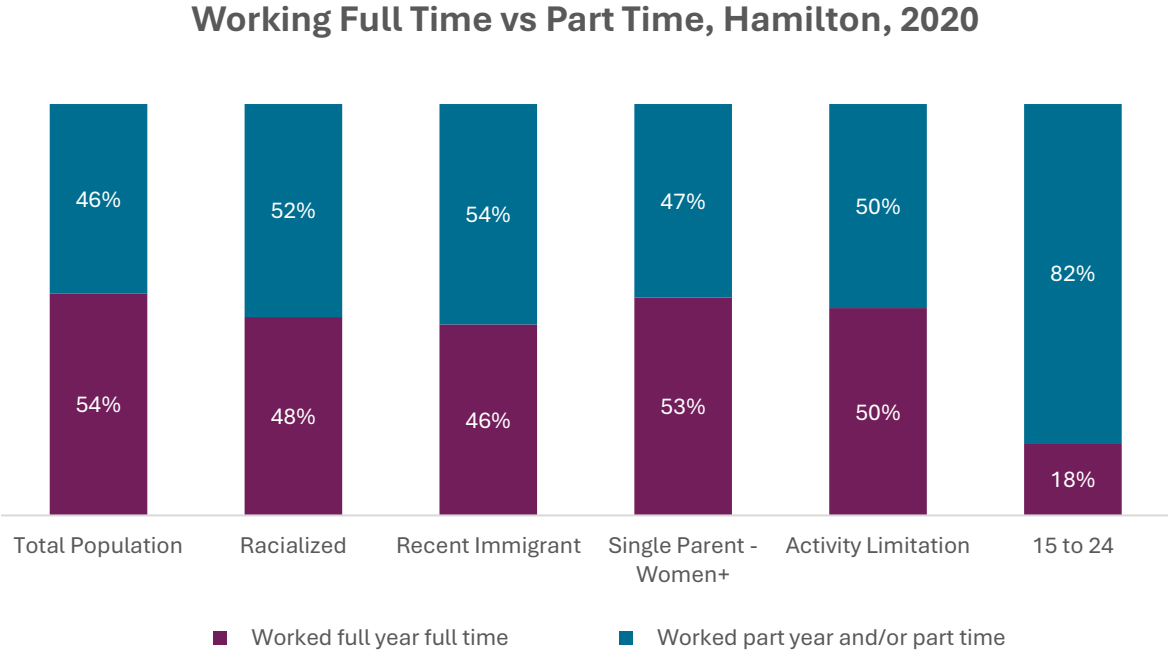
Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

Underemployment

Overall, 54% of those working in Hamilton in 2020 were employed full time, full year. This rate was similar across many of the selected demographic groups, except for those aged 15 to 24, among whom eight in ten worked part year and/or part time. These patterns closely resemble both Ontario and Canadian trends.

For those who were employed, full-time, full-year work offered greater stability and more opportunities. Among all workers, 87% were employees, while 13% were self-employed.

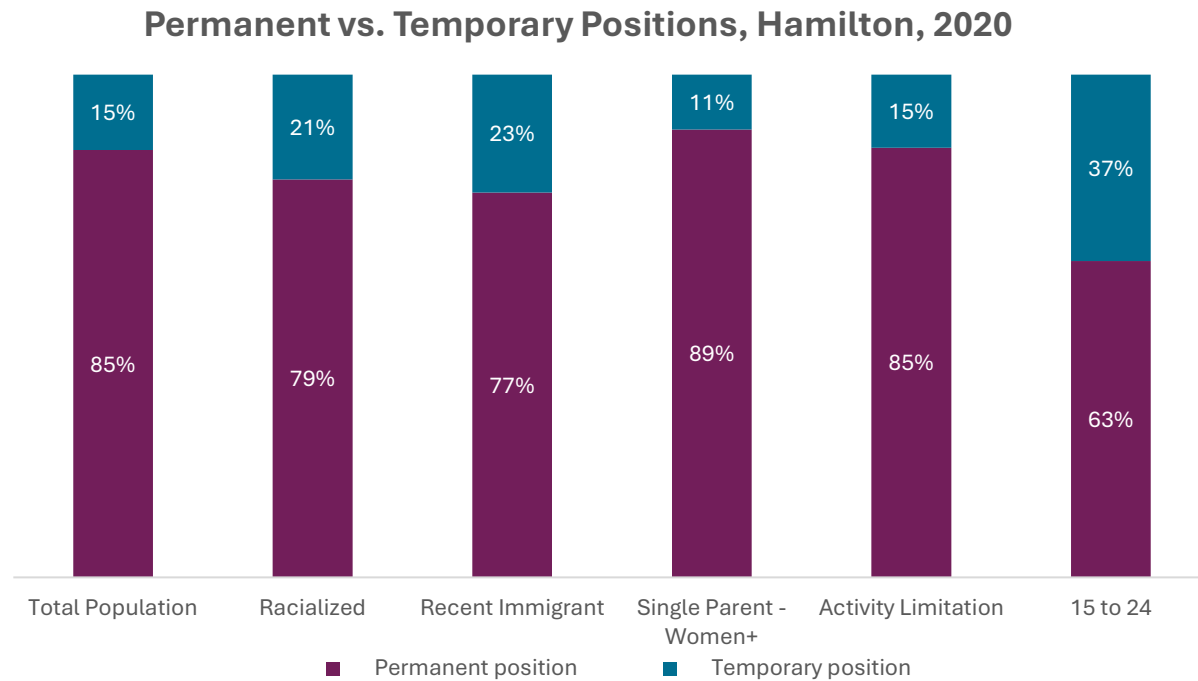
Figure 15. Working Full Time vs Part Time, Hamilton, 2020



Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

When examining permanent versus temporary employment, 85% of employees overall held permanent positions. Most groups showed a similar pattern, with the exception of youth aged 15–24, of whom only two-thirds were in permanent positions. These experiences were consistent with trends observed in Ontario and Canada.

Figure 16. Permanent vs. Temporary Positions, Hamilton



Groups with potential for career advancement through a Community Benefits Framework

A Community Benefits Framework (CBF) would support groups that have historically faced systemic barriers to employment and advancement. The data presented in this report highlights several populations that experience disproportionate challenges in the labour market, including racialized residents, recent immigrants, women-led single-parent families, individuals with activity limitations, and youth.

Over time, full-time employment has declined, while contract, seasonal, and temporary work has increased. Employment opportunities are critical for those groups facing barriers to employment, along with needs for training, mentoring, and wraparound supports. In addition, additional benefits can be realized through policies, agreements, workforce development, and inclusive hiring practices tied to development projects, economic inclusion strategies, and labour market investments through a Community Benefits Framework.

As articulated in the *Community Benefits for York Region Working Framework*², providing workforce opportunities for these targets groups will require:

- Appropriate targets for workforce opportunities that are clearly defined, monitored, and enforced, and that are informed by a strong understanding of the number and types of potential workforce opportunities associated with contracts, in particular for infrastructure and development projects
- The right supportive infrastructure to recruit, prepare, and connect jobseekers from target groups with available opportunities that contractors and all employers can access
- Building key partnerships between educational institutions, labour unions, and employers.

Such strategies can create pathways into stable, long-term employment and help advance equitable economic outcomes across Hamilton

² Community Benefits for York Region Working Framework (2019), p. 4

Business Landscape

Canadian business counts data provide the number of active establishments by industry classification and employment size categories. The data are compiled from the Business Register, which is a repository of information on the Canadian business population.

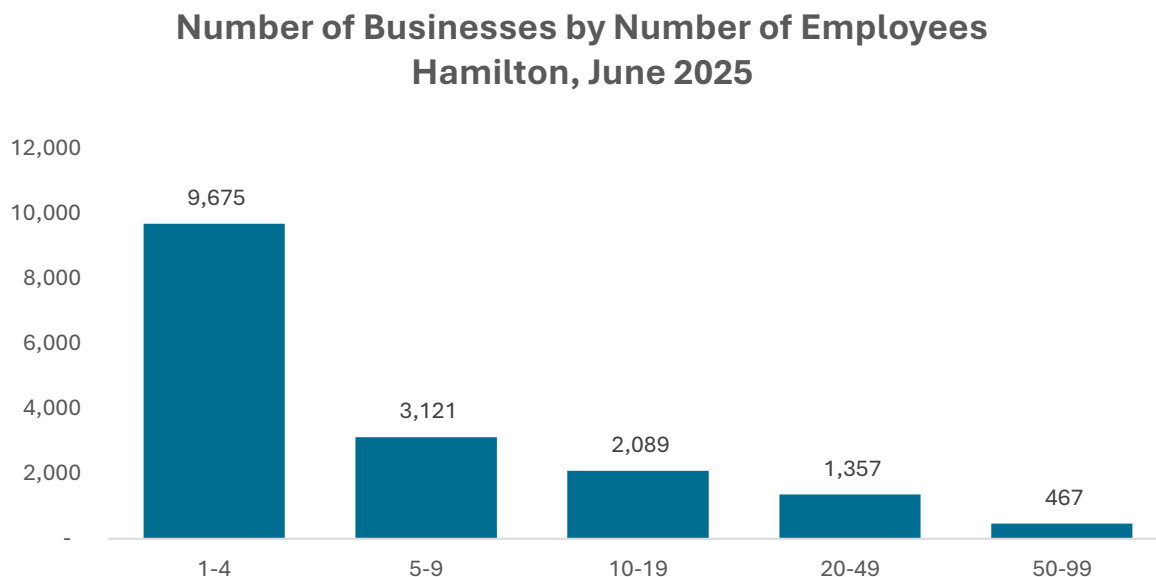
Included in the Business Register are all Canadian businesses which meet at least one of the three following criteria:

- Have an employee workforce for which they submit payroll remittances to CRA; or
- Have a minimum of \$30,000 in annual revenue; or
- Are incorporated under a federal or provincial act and have filed a federal corporate income tax form within the past three years.

Number of employees (small businesses with employees 1-99)

The majority of businesses with 1–99 employees in Hamilton are small businesses with 1-4 employees, representing 58% of all small and medium-sized firms in this size range.

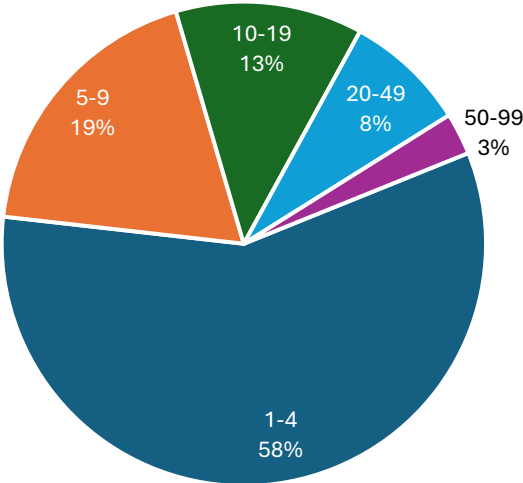
Figure 17. Number of Businesses by Number of Employees, Hamilton, June 2025



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Counts, June 2025

Figure 18. Hamilton Business by Number of Employees (%), June 2025

Hamilton Businesses by Number of Employees, June 2025



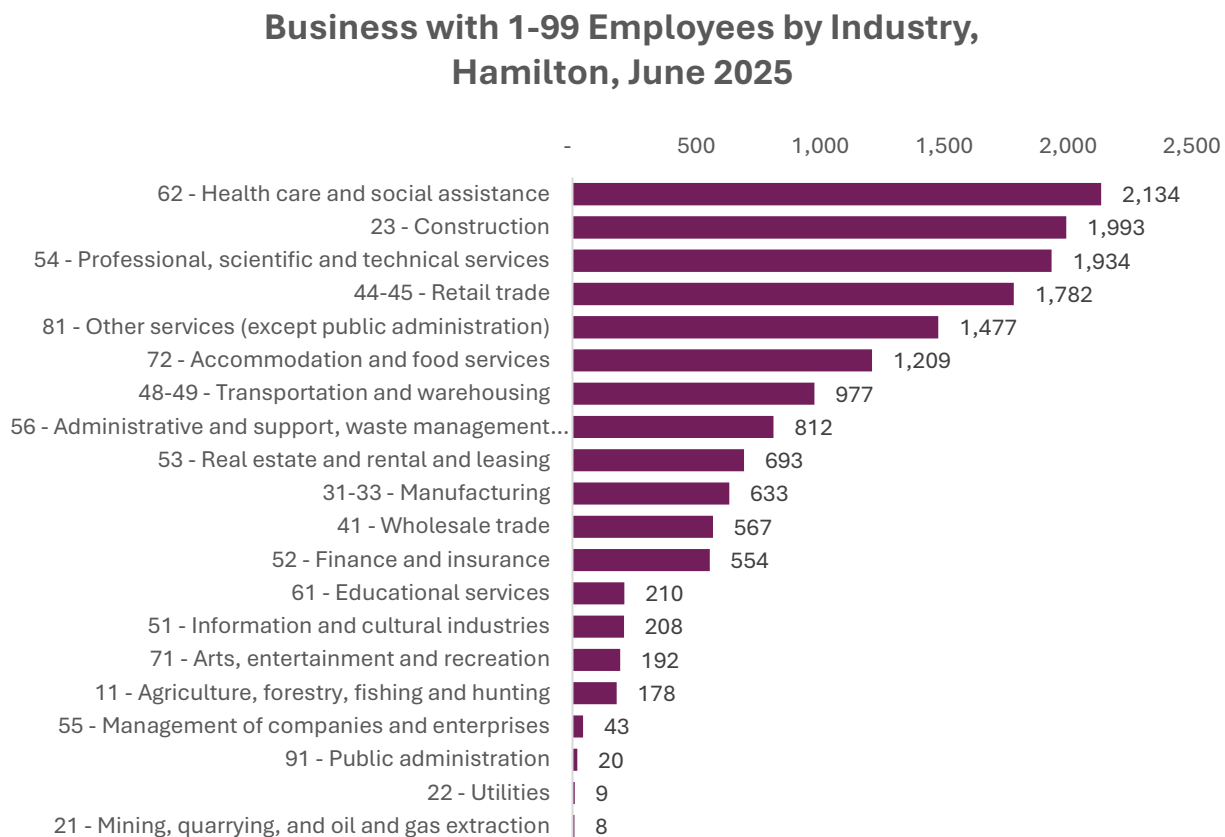
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Counts, June 2025

Industry sector

As shown in the chart, health care and social assistance is the largest industry in Hamilton by number of businesses. This is followed by construction, and then professional, scientific and technical services.

These sectors represent the core of Hamilton’s business landscape and reflect the city’s mix of service-oriented and skilled-trade-driven economic activity.

Figure 19. Businesses by Industry, Hamilton, June 2025



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Business Counts, June 2025