

# COVID SIGNPOST 200 DAYS



## REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE **Atlantic Canada**



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## INTRODUCTION

The **COVID Signpost 200** report presents a high level picture of how COVID is changing life in Canada's cities as of September 27, 2020, the 200-day mark. It draws on public health and survey data, research and thought-leader insights, building on the findings of **Signpost 100** released in June 2020.

This **Regional Perspective** is one of seven that dives deeper into how the trends and changes revealed in **Signpost 200** are playing out in different parts of the country, and what it means as we look ahead in a time of uncertainty and anxiety, but also of collective purpose in urban Canada.

### ATLANTIC CANADA

**6%**  
OF CANADA'S  
POPULATION

**1%**  
OF CANADA'S  
COVID CASES

## COVID DASHBOARD

Table 1: COVID Cases & Deaths, Region and Largest Cities<sup>1</sup>

	Cases	Cases Per 100,000	Deaths	Deaths Per 100,000	Avg. Daily Cases, 1st 100 Days	Avg. Daily Cases, 2nd 100 Days
Canada	146,663	<b>390.2</b>	9,234	<b>24.6</b>	1,002	464
Atlantic	1,612	<b>66.4</b>	70	<b>2.9</b>	15	1
Halifax	865	<b>214.6</b>	57	<b>14.1</b>	9	0.03
St. John's	87	<b>79.9</b>	1	<b>0.9</b>	0.9	0.06

<sup>1</sup> Case and death data is based on locally reported public health and municipal reports, as of September 23, 2020. In cases where city cases and death counts are reported at a larger geography, the city's share has been calculated according to the city's share of the overall population of the larger unit.

## A SELECTION OF KEY SIGNS

Table 2: Indicators of COVID Impacts<sup>2</sup>

	All expressed as %	Canada	Atlantic	Halifax	St. John's
How We Live	Household member has experienced COVID symptoms	11	8	12	8
	COVID has had a "major impact" on the household	22	20	18	18
	Rent / mortgage payments have been impacted	18	15	17	24
How We Move	Decline in transit ridership from pre-COVID	-62	-	-50	-
	Transit users that would shift to cars if service is reduced/unavailable*	42	48	51	28
	People "strictly practicing" social distancing	38	41	42	47
How We Work	Unemployment rates (August)	10.9	-	10.1	10.5
	People reporting having experienced the loss of a job	17	16	17	18
	People reporting an impact on their personal earnings	23	21	17	19
How We Care	Households reporting a high impact on access to healthcare*	30	36	59	15
	"Very concerned" with children going back to school*	26	24	25	30
	Households reporting high mental health impacts	38	36	36	31
How We Manage	COVID has caused household financial hardship	25	20	21	25
	A positive outlook on Canada's economic recovery	24	25	27	22
	Local/municipal government performing well in protecting against health risks	60	63	70	68

<sup>2</sup> Sources: Advanis survey of 90,000 Canadians during the COVID pandemic (with those marked with an asterisk reflecting survey data from June 2020); Statistics Canada data; and, TransitApp. City unemployment rates are for StatsCan CMA, with figures from the August Labour Force Survey (released September 4).



## A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE, AT 200 DAYS

By **Kourosh Rad**, CUI Regional Lead for Atlantic Canada

COVID hasn't changed Halifax yet; changing a city takes decades. But it has put a bright spotlight on our poise and our deep cuts, showing us what we have and what we lack.

On the bright side, Nova Scotia has gone without community spread of COVID for months, and as day 200 nears, we are at zero active cases. That is largely due to public trust in government, and reliance on public health experts in crafting the response.

We have also woken up to the beauty of our many urban and rural public spaces. Ever since the lockdowns, many Haligonians are using the connected trail systems, waterfronts, Citadel Hill, lakes and beaches on a regular basis. Many of these spaces were often under-utilized before the pandemic, but now you can hardly find a spot to picnic in an urban park on a sunny day. We have set new records for cyclists on our trails, streets and roads. The bike shops are reporting unprecedented sales and repairs – so much so that my own mother has decided to pick up cycling again after 43 years!

The city – urban, suburban and rural – seems full of life as well. Almost every restaurant has an outdoor patio, either on the sidewalk, in their backyard, or on a terrace. Outdoor yoga classes are commonplace, along with movie screenings and concerts along Halifax Harbour's waterfront boardwalk. Neighbours are sitting on porches and hosting small backyard parties.

But that's not the full picture. Since the beginning of the pandemic, [alcohol and drug use has increased](#), and more people are seeking support for [mental health](#). On April 18<sup>th</sup>, Nova Scotia suffered the deadliest mass shooting in Canadian history, a tragic story of [under-resourced social support, domestic violence, and questionable police actions](#).

**"A crisis of this magnitude is capable of showing us both our resiliency and the failure of our existing systems. We need to urgently plan a recovery that doesn't leave anyone behind."**



While there is hardly any traffic on Halifax's streets since COVID, and unprecedented use of bikes and scooters, we continue to face significant mobility challenges. More than anything, the rise in cycling and walking has revealed our city's lack of safe and enjoyable infrastructure for vulnerable road users. Even the temporary active transportation safety measures introduced during the lockdowns have failed. Only a few weeks ago, I was hit by a car while cycling in a newly introduced "slow street," as the car was short-cutting through a neighbourhood.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, amplified by protests around the world, has resulted in many statements from Halifax politicians and city officials. But it has sparked little action. City Hall is failing to engage its most vulnerable and marginalized communities in a meaningful manner on major infrastructure projects like the Cogswell Interchange redevelopment. The COVID *Economic Response & Recovery Plan* was developed behind closed doors without public input. While everyone has promised "to learn and do better," the lack of progress is particularly problematic in a city with the legacy of the razing and displacement of the Africville community.

Finally, COVID [amplified poverty and homelessness](#). Halifax has become unaffordable to live in. Homes are selling 20 per cent over asking and our rental vacancy is at an all-time low (under one per cent) while homelessness is at a record high. City officials (rightfully) point out that they don't have the authority to address housing issues under the terms of the Halifax Charter, and that the provincial government is too occupied managing the pandemic. Regardless, the Government of Nova Scotia is still not playing ball with the Halifax Regional Municipality on major urban issues such as housing – with consequences for the city's residents. A crisis of political deflection, when decision makers should be focused on listening and finding solutions.

A crisis of this magnitude is capable of showing us both our resiliency and the failure of our existing systems. We need to urgently plan a recovery that doesn't leave anyone behind.

### **Bright Spots:**

- The North Grove: Working with existing kitchens in the city, and with the help of donations from individuals, the North Grove, a non-profit organization in Dartmouth, has prepared 11,000 meals during the lockdowns. Many other such organizations were created during the crisis for neighbours to help each other out.

- Going hyper-local: Nova Scotian artists are selling their work locally in record numbers. Many people are purchasing directly from Atlantic Canada's farmers. Some have even managed to source as much as 50 per cent of their weekly groceries locally. Producers have been able to quickly [ramp up their online ordering](#) and delivery services as well as setting up outdoor markets to meet the demand.
- HalifACT 2050 Climate Plan: Despite significant budget shortfalls, in June 2020 in the midst of the pandemic, Halifax Council unanimously passed the climate plan known as [HalifACT 2050](#) – an ambitious and detailed plan that “aligns the Municipality’s efforts to support an equitable shift to a low-carbon economy by 2050.”
- Investments in arts and culture: There are encouraging signs that Halifax and Nova Scotia’s progressive movements are not losing momentum. This week, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, in collaboration with Develop Nova Scotia, [released](#) its design competition finalists for the new Waterfront’s Art District, which will represent a significant investment in arts in Nova Scotia.
- Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Defund the Police: The Halifax Board of Police Commissioners has [appointed](#) community activist El Jones to lead a process to define defunding the police. Halifax Council has already reduced the police budget by \$3.5 million; cut the \$500,000 budget to purchase an [armoured vehicle](#); voted to sell the first all-Black volunteer department in Canada to Upper Hammonds Plains Community Development Association for \$1; and has approved a \$175,000 budget for “African Nova Scotian Economic Action Plan”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kourosh Rad** is an urban planner, restaurant owner and social justice advocate in Halifax, Nova Scotia.



## ABOUT THE CANADIAN URBAN INSTITUTE

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