



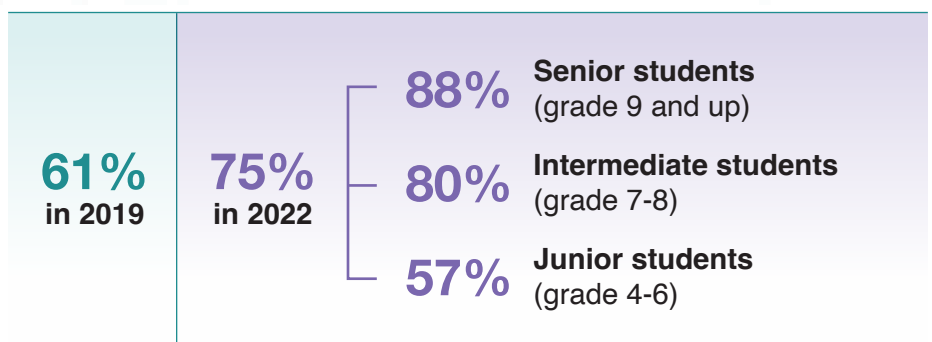
Digital Consumption

Addressing **pandemic impacts** on children and youth

What is the Problem?

With the pandemic moving many to their screens, attention has turned to the growth of social media and the lingering effects this increased screen time has had on children and youth.

In Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph this has led to a 23% increase from 2019 to 2022.



Proportion of students reporting three or more hours of screentime outside of school per day.

The 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) reported on problematic technology use in Ontario secondary school students.¹ A majority (52%) of secondary school students spent at least five hours a day on electronic devices in their free time (i.e., not for school or work purposes) and over one quarter (26%) spent at least seven hours a day on electronic devices in their free time. Almost one third of students reported being cyberbullied (bullied over the internet) at least once in the past year. Electronic device use for five and seven hours a day and cyberbullying all increased significantly from the 2019 results.



The most common symptoms of problematic technology use are **staying on devices longer than intended**, **loss of sleep**, **neglected homework** and **criticism** by parents/friends about screen time.

A recent review found that social media usage leads to body image concerns, eating disorder/disordered eating and poor mental health due to social comparison, thin/fit ideals promoted on social media and self-objectification.²

46%

Ontario students grades 7-12 who are preoccupied with their weight or body shape.

49%

Ontario students grades 7-12 reported bingeing and/or uncontrolled eating.¹

Struggling with eating issues and body image were two of the largest increases from 2019 to 2022 in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph students when looking at mental health challenges.

Three Recommendations to Address the Problem

1. **Promote healthy technology** use by encouraging uptake of the recreational screen time guidelines from the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology³ and endorsed by the Canadian Pediatric Society⁴:



Under 2 years old:
no screen time



2-4-years-olds:
1-hour daily (less is better)



5-17-year-olds:
2-hour daily (less is better)

2. **Provide education on digital literacy** to help families make informed decisions about technology use, which could include campaigns embedded into pre-existing programs (e.g., Healthy Babies Healthy Children).
3. **Increase data collection and reporting** of digital consumption and social media behaviours of children and youth in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph to enhance decision making and health promotion in these areas.

References

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