We selected 19 indicators to demonstrate the health of the region’s society in terms of sustainability. Of these indicators, 15 show that the health of our society is below the provincial average, while four show statistics that are average or better than average. Of the 15 indicators that are below average, seven show signs that they are improving and will continue to improve over time. The areas needing most improvement are:

- Minimizing poverty to help residents meet their basic needs;
- Providing accessible, affordable housing; and
- Focusing on alternative means of transportation.

**Social Characteristics**

*Are residents healthy? Are health care services and facilities available when needed?*

Based on the indicators selected for this characteristic, the health of the region is stable and getting better. Birth weights are generally good, with the incidence of low birth weight at 32 to 49 incidences per 1000 births (depending on the subregion). The rate of births to teenage mothers in the region is decreasing, and life expectancy at birth was 79.9 years in 2003. However, this is lower than the average provincial rate of 80.8 years. More information is needed to assess the availability of the health services.

*Are residents educated or trained to qualify for employment?*

In the RDN one out of every three 18-year-olds does not graduate from high school as compared to one out of four for the province. High school is the minimum requirement for most better-paying jobs. However, the number of students who do graduate has been increasing since 1998.

*Is there a wide variety of employment opportunities, and are residents employed?*

Nanaimo’s unemployment rate has declined to about 7.5 per cent, as has the number of residents receiving employment insurance. However, both rates still exceed the provincial average. There are no other data available on unemployment for the rest of the region.

*Is poverty minimized? Can residents meet their basic needs?*

The overall pattern for the region suggests an increase in the number of people living below the poverty line. Indicators show that in 2001, as many as 21,000 people may have been living below the poverty line. The RDN is below the provincial average for this indicator.
Is housing affordable, and is there a variety of different types and sizes of housing available?
In 2001, the most recent year for which statistics were available, about eight per cent of RDN residents had inadequate, unsuitable and/or unaffordable housing, about the same as the provincial average. From 1991 to 1996 there was a drastic increase in core housing need across the province. Although this need had declined by 2001, the RDN had the highest percentage of renters in core housing need, at 36 per cent, above the provincial average of 31 per cent. The RDN also has the highest number of applicants per subsidized housing unit in the province.

Is the need for travel minimized? Do necessary trips rely solely on automobile travel or do residents use other methods of transportation?
Residences located within 400 metres of multiple amenities have increased in the last few years. However, the number of vehicles in each municipality increased between 2001 and 2003. Just eight per cent of RDN residents walk or cycle to work, and only two per cent of the population uses public transit. Most people (88 per cent of residents in 2001) rely on vehicles to commute to work. However, more people are using public transit than in the past, bus rides increased by 45 per cent between 1998 and 2004, and ridership increased by 39 per cent per capita within the same period.

Is the region a safe place to live? Do residents care for and respect each other?
The crime rate is decreasing in the RDN. This includes serious violent crime (juvenile and adult), non-cannabis drug offences (juvenile and adult) and break-and-enter crimes (juvenile and adult). This decrease has been consistent since 1999.

Are there opportunities for residents to interact with each other, and with nature?
Since 2000, registration has increased for recreational, cultural and continuing studies programs and courses offered by the RDN, Malaspina University-College and the City of Nanaimo. Use has increased at RDN and City of Nanaimo arenas and Aquatic Centres, and 6,078 organized groups make use of sports fields in School Districts 68 and 69. The region has 27.75 hectares of park land per 1,000 residents, including activity parks, nature parks and provincial parks.

In terms of voter turnout, participation in the last three federal elections has increased overall, while participation in provincial elections has decreased. Voter turnout for municipal elections shows no discernible trend.