



Office of the Commissioner  
Community and Health Services Department

## MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Date: August 20, 2020

Re: Update on the Implementation of Ontario Health Teams in York Region

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This memorandum provides an update to the York Region's Partnership on Local Ontario Health Teams report brought forward in [September 2019](#).

It will provide an overview of Ontario Health Teams, their planned role in Ontario's health care system, and the current status of their development, including their involvement in local COVID-19 responses. This memo will also provide an update on Regional participation and support to the development of Ontario Health Teams, and considerations on possible opportunities moving forward as Ontario Health Teams transform how local health care is administered and delivered in the province.

### **Significant changes in Ontario's health care system have been introduced over the past year, including the creation of Ontario Health and the development of Ontario Health Teams**

On June 6, 2019, the *Connecting Care Act, 2019* came into effect in Ontario. This Act began the process of consolidating six provincial health care agencies and 14 Local Health Integration Networks into a single agency called [Ontario Health](#) to oversee health care delivery across the province. Currently, Local Health Integration Networks are responsible for planning, coordinating, integrating and funding health services at the local level, including services provided through hospitals, community health centres, and long-term care homes. The Central Local Health Integration Network has been operating in York Region since 2006.

As part of establishing Ontario Health, the 14 Local Health Integration Networks have been reduced to five interim geographic regions that will cover expanded areas – western, eastern, central, Toronto, and northern Ontario. In York Region, the Central Local Health Integration

Network will continue to handle administrative functions, including health services planning, coordination, and funding, until the full transition to Ontario Health is complete.

As part of these changes the Province also introduced the Ontario Health Teams model to help implement the mandate and achieve the objectives of Ontario Health. Ontario Health Teams are groups of health care providers and organizations, including hospitals, primary care providers, community support service providers, emergency health services, and long-term care homes, that are accountable for delivering a full and coordinated continuum of care to a defined geographic population. The goals of Ontario Health Teams are to improve patient and caregiver experience, strengthen local services, and make it easier for people to navigate the health care system throughout their lives. [In December 2019](#), the Ministry of Health announced the first cohort of 24 Ontario Health Teams to be established across the province.

### **Public Health Ontario, a separate provincial agency, and local public health units are not directly impacted by Ontario Health changes**

Public Health Ontario, a provincial agency established in 2008 to provide scientific and technical advice to health care practitioners working in government, public health and related sectors, is separate from Ontario Health. Public Health Ontario supports and works closely with Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health and local public health units, including York Region Public Health. Local public health units administer health promotion and disease prevention programs to inform the public about healthy lifestyles, communicable disease control, immunization, food premises inspection, healthy growth and development, and health education.

The Province has announced its plan to consolidate Ontario's 34 local public health units into 10, as reported to Council in [May 2019](#). Staff will monitor future announcements related to these plans and will provide updates to Council, as appropriate.

### **Three Ontario Health Teams currently operate in York Region**

Of the 24 Ontario Health Teams originally announced in December 2019, two teams will be providing services to residents in York Region: Eastern York Region North Durham Ontario Health Team and Southlake Community Ontario Health Team. [On July 23, 2020](#), the Province announced five additional Ontario Health Teams, including a third in York Region, Western York Region Ontario Health Team. Led by a hospital, each York Region Team is comprised of multiple partners from York Region's health care and social services sectors, and have been active in establishing governance mechanisms and work plans to operationalize their activities.

In their early phase of implementation, Ontario Health Teams will focus their efforts at improving specific areas of the health care system for particular patient populations. As the Province consolidates health care administration and delivery, broader functions currently under Local Health Integration Networks, such as home and community care, will eventually transition into Ontario Health and/or to local Ontario Health Teams.

In the long-term, each Ontario Health Team will be responsible for the overall health of their attributed population, determined in part by geographic area. Additional information about each Ontario Health Team operating in York Region, including their geographic areas of service and current areas of focus, are detailed in Table 1 and in Attachment 1. Table 1 also outlines the collaborative working groups helping drive the implementation of these Ontario Health Teams; Regional staff provides input, participation and leadership as part of these working groups.

**Table 1**  
**Ontario Health Teams Operating in York Region**

Team	Lead	Municipal Boundaries	Focus Areas	Working Groups
Eastern York Region North Durham	Markham Stouffville Hospital	Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Uxbridge and Brock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a coordinated access model for clients, families, caregivers, and service providers seeking mental health, addiction and dementia services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and navigation</li> <li>• Supports for primary care/congregate living</li> <li>• Digital health</li> <li>• Community mobility and engagement</li> <li>• Dementia</li> </ul>
Southlake Community	Southlake Regional Health Centre	Aurora, Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Newmarket and Bradford West Gwillimbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transitions to post-acute care</li> <li>• Keeping people healthy in the community</li> <li>• Reduce emergency department visits and hospital admission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational best practices</li> <li>• Digital health</li> <li>• Care models for patients with mental health and addictions, and seniors</li> </ul>
Western York Region	Mackenzie Health	King, Richmond Hill, Vaughan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frail older adults with chronic health concerns</li> <li>• Dementia</li> <li>• Palliative care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be determined – Ontario Health Team announced July 23, 2020</li> </ul>

**As a formal partner, the Region has been deeply involved in, and supportive of, the development of local Ontario Health Teams**

Partnership on local Ontario Health Teams aligns with Regional strategic priorities around community health, safety and well-being, and complements direct Regional service delivery

responsibilities in the areas of long-term care, paramedic services and public health. Recognizing the successful continuum of care involves measures to promote and sustain individual well-being, Ontario Health Teams are also interested in working with community and other partners to understand and address social determinants of health. These interests overlap and align with the objectives of the Region's social service and community development programs.

Recognizing the value of partnership and collaborative opportunities through Ontario Health Teams, on September 26, 2019 Council approved York Region's participation as a full partner on Eastern York Region North Durham and Southlake Community Ontario Health Teams and authorized the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to sign agreements to operationalize our partnership with Ontario Health Teams and support their development. Western York Region Ontario Health Team was only recently approved by the Province, and engagement with this team is underway to confirm partnership opportunities.

As a partner on Ontario Health Teams, Regional staff actively participates on governance and decision-making tables, contributes to and supports the development of partnership agreements, co-chairs and participates on various working groups and action teams, and connects Ontario Health Teams to partners in the community. The Region also provides operational and program knowledge, data, research and communications supports. Examples of Regional support and involvement include:

- Seats at the leadership/decision-making tables for both Eastern York Region North Durham and Southlake Community Ontario Health Teams to assist in the establishment, strategic planning, design and implementation of both Teams
- Supports for the development of a standard digital inventory of available community and social resources to promote better system access and navigation
- Assistance with strategic communications planning for the Eastern York Region North Durham Team, including brand development and community outreach strategies
- Participation in the development of a needs assessment to identify gaps between primary care teams and mental health, addictions, and dementia services
- Support for Southlake Community Ontario Health Team's participation in the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario Best Practice Spotlight Initiative, focused on implementing best practice guidelines for client and family-centred care

### **Partnerships with Ontario Health Teams have played an important role in supporting the Region's response to COVID-19**

The relationship with Ontario Health Teams was one of the partnerships the Region has been able to leverage to respond to community needs that emerged as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Through and with supports from Ontario Health Teams, the Region has been

able to pilot new and innovative care models, and coordinate support services for vulnerable residents, including:

- Coordinating services for vulnerable residents experiencing homelessness at the self-isolation shelter in the Town of East Gwillimbury and, more broadly, partnering on solutions for congregate living sites
- Participating to help establish an Ontario Health Teams partners table to provide essential services to those most in need, including grocery delivery, meals and transportation to medical appointments
- Supporting expansion of innovative digital care services, such as remote care monitoring initiatives

The Ministry of Health has recognized how the partnerships created through Ontario Health Teams supported local health care and social service providers to rapidly and effectively respond to COVID-19. While Ontario Health Team partners worked together to respond to COVID-19, most of the scheduled planning work to formalize Team functions and operations was put on hold as partners shifted priorities to respond to the pandemic. As Ontario enters into a state of reopening and recovery, the Province has resumed Ontario Health Team implementation with renewed momentum.

### **The Province has announced next steps for Ontario Health Teams, including investing \$25.25 million to directly support the 29 approved Ontario Health Teams**

[On July 23, 2020](#), the Province announced it will be investing \$25.25 million to directly support the 29 approved Ontario Health Teams. Of this funding, \$9.5 million will be dedicated to virtual care to provide more support for vulnerable populations and individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19. With the additional \$15.75 million, each Ontario Health Team will receive up to \$375,000 to be used for expanding digital care, human resources to implement the Ontario Health Team model, and purchasing business information tools to measure Ontario Health Team performance and outcomes.

As the Ontario Health Team model continues to evolve, the Province remains engaged with key stakeholders. Through involvement with Ontario Health Teams, Regional staff had an opportunity to contribute to a review of proposed changes to Acts under Bill 175, *Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020*. Staff highlighted the need to further break down silos between health care and social services, create strong conflict of interest and accountability provisions, and equity and decision-making considerations to ensure appropriate and effective bed placement in the event that Ontario Health Teams assume Long-Term Care placement functions from the Local Health Integration Networks.

## **Future vision of Ontario Health Teams will have impacts and opportunities for York Region's community and health services**

The Province's vision to eventually incorporate all sectors of local health care systems into the Ontario Health Team model could have significant implications for the Region across many areas of community and health services.

## **The impact of the pandemic on long-term care has put a spotlight on the sector and the role that long-term care homes play in Ontario's health care system, their linkages to hospitals, public health, and emergency health services**

As the Province dissolves Local Health Integration Networks, it is expected that Ontario Health Teams will assume certain home and community care functions, and potentially include administering funding and managing resident placement into long-term care homes in their respective catchment area. Long-term care homes are an integral part of the continuum of care and must be a key part of every Ontario Health Team, where their expertise and knowledge of this sector can be leveraged. We will continue to use our role at the Ontario Health Team tables in York Region to advocate that the Region's two municipal long-term care homes, Newmarket Health Centre in the Town of Newmarket and Maple Health Centre in the City of Vaughan, are integrated into the Ontario Health Teams.

## **York Region Paramedic Services has been providing support to vulnerable populations for years, which aligns with the patient cohorts that the local Ontario Health Teams will focus on**

The significant role that York Region Paramedic Services, Community Paramedicine team has played during the COVID-19 response has also highlighted the Region's integral role in supporting vulnerable populations, including seniors, people experiencing homelessness, and individuals living with developmental disabilities, mental health concerns or substance misuse. This work is aligned with the interests of Ontario Health Teams and the Province's objective of ending hallway medicine. There will be further opportunities for Paramedic Services to support Ontario Health Teams as the Province considers protocols that may allow patients to be transported to service providers other than hospital emergency departments to receive treatment.

It will be imperative for the Region to remain at the local planning tables to ensure that we are able to effectively influence direction related to, and are receiving the appropriate resources to support, this work.

## **Partnership with Ontario Health Teams will also support and provide new opportunities to inform the Region’s approach to social services delivery and community development**

For example, Ontario Health Team-led digital projects are looking at enabling direct referrals from the health system to broader supports and social services—including those delivered by the Region such as Ontario Works, homelessness prevention and housing services—as part of an individual’s care plan. This kind of integration represents an opportunity to strengthen linkages between local health care systems and social services, recognizing the interrelationship between social factors and health outcomes in determining and sustaining resident health and well-being.

## **There is also an opportunity to leverage and involve Ontario Health Teams in the development and implementation of the Community Safety and Well-being Plan for York Region**

Ontario Health Teams’ focus on areas like mental health for their attributed population aligns with the risk and place-based approach York Region is taking in developing its Community Safety and Well-being Plan. Data and information sharing between Ontario Health Team partners will enhance the Region’s ability to identify and understand community needs and social service gaps. Through Ontario Health Teams, there is also an opportunity to foster new relationships with local community agencies and strengthen existing ones, and identify and leverage programs and services delivered by Ontario Health Team partners to fill service gaps and address priorities identified under York Region’s Community Safety and Well-being Plan. More information on the development of York Region’s Community Safety and Well-being Plan can be found in the [June 2020](#) memo.

## **Staff will continue to engage and support local Ontario Health Teams and monitor developments**

Staff will continue to monitor developments in the transformation of provincial health care delivery, and support Eastern York Region North Durham, Southlake Community, and Western York Region Ontario Health Teams as they move forward in their implementation.

One of the immediate areas of collaboration includes preparation for and implementation of measures to respond to COVID-19, particularly for a potential ‘second wave’ of the pandemic. This includes contact tracing, medical supports for congregate living facilities, supporting the Region’s implementation of infection prevention measures in its two long-term care homes and partnering with Public Health on collection and analysis of socio-demographic data.

Given the complexities of health care system transformation and to build on the momentum achieved to date in implementing the Ontario Health Team model, consideration may be needed to provide additional resources to sustain and enhance the Region’s involvement on Ontario Health Teams. This analysis will include seeking opportunities to obtain Provincial or Ontario

Health funding to offset incremental Regional costs. Any additional funding for resource needs will be considered as part of the budget process.

Further updates and recommendations to Council will follow, as appropriate.

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Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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Bruce Macgregor  
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments (1)  
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