



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: May 19, 2021

Re: York Region Seniors Strategy Refresh

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This memorandum provides an overview on the approach and plan for the York Region Seniors Strategy Refresh, as previously reported to Committee of the Whole in [September 2019](#) and as discussed at the [January 2021](#) meeting.

Work on the Seniors Strategy Refresh was put on hold as the Seniors Strategy Team was redeployed in March 2020 to support York Region's long-term care homes in response to COVID-19. Staff plan to provide Council with the Seniors Strategy Refresh which will include a 2-Year Action Plan in June 2022.

### **The current York Region Seniors Strategy defines the Region's role in serving seniors**

According to Statistics Canada 2016 Census data, the Region's seniors' population is growing faster than any other age group. It is projected by 2026, that for the first time there will be more seniors than children in York Region, and by 2031, one in five of the Region's residents will be over the age of 65.

In [November 2016](#), Regional Council approved the [York Region Seniors Strategy](#) (the Strategy), which guides corporate collaborative planning activities to better integrate and prepare for the growing and aging York Region population. The Strategy's vision is to support seniors to age in place – that is to live in the home or community of their choice for as long as they are able.

The Strategy positions the Region to take action where it has responsibility, to advocate and influence decision-making where others have a role to play and to bring together key players across the sector to address issues related to the needs of seniors.

The Strategy identifies four result areas for action and advocacy to support seniors to age in place:

- Balancing the needs of seniors with all residents
- Keeping seniors healthier, longer
- Supporting age friendly, complete communities
- Connecting seniors and caregivers to the right programs and services at the right time

### **The Seniors Strategy Refresh provides an opportunity to review the current direction, identify what has changed, and where new actions are needed to support seniors to age in place in York Region**

In [January 2021](#), Regional Council members engaged in a discussion about the longstanding and significant issues facing the long-term care sector. Council agreed that a broader response is needed to meet the needs of the York Region seniors population and that Council has a leadership role to play to urge the Province and others to build a more resilient system of holistic supports for seniors through the aging journey.

### **Significant changes in the seniors sector over the past few years have highlighted challenges, gaps and opportunities that will inform the Seniors Strategy Refresh**

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on seniors, especially those who were already considered vulnerable. Social isolation, deteriorating health status, access to food and lack of in-person access to programs and services in safe spaces have become more pronounced during the pandemic. Technology and the use of virtual programming are now vital to the delivery of services for seniors which is likely to continue beyond COVID-19.

The long-term care sector has been at the epicentre of the pandemic's Wave 1 and Wave 2. The Province has made significant investments to modernize and build a safer long-term care system and is committed to expanding access to long-term care as part of its commitment to end hallway medicine. The recommendations of the [Ontario Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission](#) and the [Auditor General's Special Report](#) on Pandemic Readiness and Response in Long-Term Care are expected to bring further reforms to address the long-standing issues in the sector to keep staff, residents and caregivers safe and to deliver the high-quality care seniors deserve. These much-needed reforms will inform the actions of the Seniors Strategy Refresh. Staff will report to Council on the Ontario Long-Term Care COVID-19 recommendations this fall.

Restructuring the health care system through Ontario Health Teams means changes to how supports are delivered to seniors. All three York Region Ontario Health Teams have identified older adults with complex conditions as a priority and are exploring a variety of solutions to address the unique needs of the communities they serve. In working with Ontario Health Teams, the Region has the following opportunities:

- To foster new relationships with local community agencies and strengthen existing ones

- To identify and leverage programs and services delivered by Ontario Health Team partners to fill service gaps for seniors
- To address the priorities identified for the Seniors Strategy Refresh

## **The Province is increasing the number of long-term care beds in York Region**

On [March 18, 2021](#), Minister Fullerton announced 7,500 new long-term care spaces with an investment of \$933 million for 80 projects across the province. This includes a mix of new builds and upgrades for nine long-term care sites in York Region, bringing an estimated 1,530 new beds and upgrades to 354 existing spaces to the Region.

Staff are conducting a further analysis to identify the impact of this announcement for York Region to better understand the impact of the new beds and upgrades to existing spaces announced on the total number of beds in the Region. For example, long-term care homes are no longer permitted to have three to four bed wards. Upgrading such spaces to private or basic rooms may reduce a Home's total bed count. Further information and analysis are needed for each Home in York Region to better understand the impacts of the Ministry's announcement on the Region's total bed count.

Further details included in the announcement on the nine projects for York Region are provided in Attachment 1.

## **Expanding the capacity of long-term care settings is only one of many solutions to improve the system serving seniors**

While the Province's announcement responds to the Region's advocacy efforts for more beds for York Region, it does not fully address the long waitlists.

The [November 2020](#) Forecast for Long-Term Care and Seniors' Housing Implications Report showed there will be significant unmet need of almost 15,000 long-term care beds across York Region by 2041. Given that meeting future demand for long-term care is likely out of reach and many seniors have indicated their preference to live in their own communities for as long as they can, solutions that consider housing options in the community are needed. For example, significant investments are needed for additional senior friendly housing options including condominiums, purpose-built rental housing, community housing, life leases and affordable retirement homes. To successfully age in the community, these investments must be accompanied by a range of additional supports including home and community supports, hospice services and other wrap around services.

As part of the Seniors Strategy Refresh, the Region will continue to advocate for additional long-term care beds as well as investments in senior friendly housing options and other support services seniors need to remain in their own homes longer.

## **The Seniors Strategy Refresh will set out the collaborative corporate strategic directions and identify key actions for 2022 to 2024**

The directions of the Seniors Strategy will continue to guide the collaborative corporate planning activities to address the needs of seniors in York Region and work with other levels of government and community partners to target programs and services where there is greatest need. The Seniors Strategy Refresh will review progress to date on current actions and identify data and research trends related to seniors to inform priorities for the Strategy that reflect current needs and opportunities to support seniors to age in place.

A focused 2-Year Action Plan will be included with the Refresh that identifies actions where the Region has a role to play, actions that advance a Regional priority as well as areas for advocacy where the Region does not have a mandate but where others have responsibility to act to address an identified need. The 2-Year Action Plan provides a tighter timeline to identify actions and advocacy areas that can be implemented, measured and adjusted every two years to better reflect the current needs and aligned with changes happening with other levels of government and community partners.

## **Work on the Seniors Strategy Refresh will take place through 2021 and 2022**

The approach and plan for the Seniors Strategy Refresh including a 2-Year Action Plan will be carried out over the coming year in three stages:

1. Define the scope of the Seniors Strategy Refresh (estimated August to October 2021)
2. Consultation and engagement with key stakeholders to identify common priorities, and actions the Region could take to support seniors to age in place (estimated November 2021 to January 2022)
3. Validate proposed priorities and actions to be included in the Seniors Strategy Refresh through a workshop with Council (estimated February 2022 to March 2022)

It is anticipated the Seniors Strategy Refresh will be presented to Council for final approval in June 2022.

## **The Human Services Planning Board was engaged in a preliminary discussion about the approach and plan for the Seniors Strategy Refresh**

In March 2021, staff presented to the Human Services Planning Board to seek feedback on the approach and plan for the Refresh and to ask for interested members to be part of future discussions.

The Board supported the overall approach and plan for the refresh. They also highlighted the need to consider the impact of technology not only in delivering seniors services but also as an opportunity to combat senior isolation and loneliness. Discussion included recommendations for focusing on culturally-specific service models; aging-in-place at home and in the community not just with a long-term care focus, but also with a community-based focus; considering the affordability of seniors housing and senior homelessness; and providing better pay and benefits

for personal support workers. Several Board members expressed interest in participating in future discussions on the Seniors Strategy Refresh.

### **Defining the scope of the Seniors Strategy Refresh and action plan will start with a scan of the environment and a data review**

Beginning this Fall, staff will begin defining the plan and scope for the Refresh starting with a review of the current Strategy's achievements to date, data on seniors in York Region and current research trends identified by other levels of government, major research institutions and advocacy groups in the seniors care sector. Not only is it important to understand seniors in York Region including diversity of need, vulnerabilities and cultural and ethnic backgrounds, but it is also important to consider where changes are occurring, and to examine the issues, trends and findings of the experts in the field. This review will help to inform the development of the consultation and engagement plan and support evidence-based decisions as future directions and priorities are considered for the Seniors Strategy Refresh.

Staff will examine how COVID-19 has impacted seniors and organizations that provide supports to seniors, the challenges and opportunities brought to light by the pandemic and changes that need to be considered moving forward.

### **Consultations will be held with the United Way Greater Toronto/York Region Seniors Cluster Table, seniors and key community stakeholders to gain insight into their experiences and identify common priorities to be considered in the Seniors Strategy Refresh**

Consultations will include virtual engagement sessions and a survey to be carried out from late 2021 into early 2022 with seniors and key stakeholders to gather information on the following:

- Stakeholder and partner experiences and insights about seniors
- System gaps
- Priorities for change
- Potential actions the Region could take to support seniors to age in place and address system gaps

There is a significant opportunity to build on the momentum of the successful collaborations and new partnerships developed over the past year through the United Way Greater Toronto/York Region Seniors Cluster Table, established as part of the COVID-19 Community Coordination Initiative to support the needs of vulnerable seniors during COVID-19. Members of the Seniors Cluster Table include leaders from United Way Greater Toronto funded community organizations serving seniors, local municipalities, York Region staff and York Regional Police.

Leveraging the knowledge and expertise of the Seniors Cluster Table and expanding its membership to include other seniors-focused organizations and key stakeholders like members of the Human Services Planning Board will provide an opportunity to capture the important

insights and broad perspectives to be responsive to the changing needs of seniors in York Region. The Region is one player in the complex system of programs and services that serve seniors and the Seniors Strategy Refresh will identify actions where the Region has a mandate to act and advocacy efforts where others have a role to play to address the identified needs.

It is anticipated that this expanded Seniors Cluster Table will be engaged through four or five touch points beginning in the Fall 2021. Additional engagements will seek the input and insights from the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee, local municipalities, and other senior serving organizations and funders.

**The final stage for the development of the Seniors Strategy Refresh is a proposed Council Workshop in early 2022 to seek input on proposed priorities and actions**

Prior to the report back to Regional Council in June 2022, staff propose a Council Workshop to discuss what was heard through the Seniors Cluster Table and community and sector engagements and seek feedback on the priorities and actions to be considered under the Seniors Strategy Refresh.

The events of the past year have highlighted that collaborative, and innovative ways of thinking will be key to keep seniors safe and supported as they age. The Seniors Strategy Refresh provides an opportunity to be responsive and aligned with the changing needs of seniors in York Region.



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Katherine Chislett  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



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Bruce Macgregor  
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Attachments (1)  
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