



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: October 22, 2021

Re: Inclusion Charter for York Region – Update

This memorandum provides an update on the Inclusion Charter for York Region since the last update in [2019](#). When endorsed by Regional Council on [June 28, 2018](#), staff committed to provide regular updates on actions and results.

The Inclusion Charter responds to the Region’s growth and diversity, and supports the Region’s vision of strong, caring and safe communities

York Region is one of the fastest growing and most diverse communities in Canada. As of 2016, [1.1 million people call York Region home](#), speaking over [120 different languages](#) and coming from over [230 distinct ethnic origins](#), with approximately [49% of residents identifying themselves as a visible minority and 47% of residents born outside of Canada](#). Data from 2017 also indicates that [nearly one in five York Region residents \(age 15 and over\) had at least one disability](#).

The Inclusion Charter for York Region enshrines a commitment, and provides a foundation for action, to creating a welcoming and inclusive community, where this diversity is celebrated and where everyone can develop to their full potential, participate freely in society and live with respect, dignity and freedom from discrimination. The Charter is a community initiative developed by the Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group, which includes 20 member organizations that serve people who live, work and visit York Region and brings together municipalities, police services, hospitals, school boards, conservation authorities and agencies with a common commitment to welcoming and inclusive communities. A list of Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group member organizations is included as Attachment 1.

Recent events underscore the importance of the Inclusion Charter, which provides a strong foundation for action and change

The Inclusion Charter's importance has been underscored by recent events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, a focus on addressing anti-Indigenous, anti-Black and anti-Asian racism, and the rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. The most up to date [hate crime data](#), from York Regional Police, indicates that in 2020 there was a 20.3% increase in hate crime over 2019.

York Region remains committed to achieving the vision of the Inclusion Charter

York Region has advanced [many actions](#) since the Charter was endorsed in June 2018 to achieve the vision of the Inclusion Charter, including:

- Creating a diversity calendar to raise awareness about faith, cultural and other significant dates throughout the year
- Establishing quiet rooms (dedicated, comfortable spaces for prayer, reflection and meditation) across 14 Regional buildings
- Introducing diversity and inclusion training for York Region employees

The following sections will provide further information on some of the more recent and significant actions resulting from the Inclusion Charter.

Regional actions in 2020 and 2021 included a focus on addressing anti-Black racism within the organization and in the community

In 2020, Regional Council [recognized](#) the [International Decade for People of African Descent](#). A corporate framework for action was also developed and initiated to help guide and support organizational efforts to address anti-Black racism. Specific activities include:

- Creating an Anti-Black Racism Advisory Group consisting of Black staff and focused on supporting the roll-out of the framework for action
- Circulating an acknowledgment and denouncement of anti-Black racism and commitment to action by the Region's senior leadership team
- Undertaking an employee demographic survey to understand the employee landscape
- Implementing supports for Black staff, including an Employee Resource Group
- Developing training / resource materials on anti-Black racism for management and staff

This work will continue in 2022 and beyond and will include actions such as an equity audit of human resources policies and practices (informed by results of the employee demographic survey) and developing and implementing actions to address identified gaps.

The framework for action also includes engaging with the local Black community in York Region to explore and advance community development opportunities, partnerships and collective actions. Key issues raised through engagement with Black community agencies include the need for culturally appropriate health supports, including COVID-19 resources and mental health supports, increased opportunity and ability to participate at decision-making tables, and concerns about trust with and access to Regional programs, services and funding opportunities.

The Region has been leveraging the health and social service response to COVID-19 as an opportunity to strengthen relationships with the Black community

York Region Alliance of African Canadian Communities was part of the Region's COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, providing valuable insight and helping create critical connections into community. As part of the implementation of the [High Priority Communities Strategy](#), Public Health and Lead Agencies (Carefirst Seniors and Community Services Association and Vaughan Community Health Centre) have been working with a coalition of local agencies that include Black community organizations, such as the African Canadian National Coalition against Hate, Oppression and Racism (ANCHOR, formerly the Vaughan African Canadian Association).

York Region is currently working with the local Black community and with the Black Physicians' Association of Ontario to help inform targeted vaccination initiatives. Black community organizations have also been invited to participate on [the COVID-19 Community Coordination Initiative](#) the Region co-hosts with United Way Greater Toronto.

Corporate Diversity Celebrations were initiated in 2021, complementing ongoing learning opportunities for staff within the Region

Learning about each other, and recognizing and celebrating all dimensions of diversity, are foundational to our commitment to inclusion. To support continued learning, celebrate the diversity of York Region and foster a stronger sense of inclusion and belonging in our workplace, corporate inclusion celebrations within the Region were introduced in 2021.

Corporate Diversity Celebrations included acknowledgements and activities to mark Black History Month, International Women's Day, Asian Heritage Month, Jewish Heritage Month, National AccessAbility Week, National Indigenous History Month, Pride Month, Emancipation Day and Islamic Heritage Month. The choice of observances is informed by the most up-to-date [hate crime data provided by York Regional Police](#), providing a data-informed approach to identify priority areas to improve cultural understanding and sense of belonging. This work is also grounded in the principle "Nothing About Us Without Us," where staff members of the group being celebrated are integral contributors informing and driving the work.

These celebrations complement and build on efforts to expand and deepen cultural competency and understanding of key diversity, equity and inclusion topics for Regional staff. Education and awareness activities include monthly inclusion resources providing an opportunity for ongoing learning on various topics such as unconscious bias, privilege and intersectionality. Monthly diversity greeting messages for management to raise awareness and educate staff about faith,

cultural and other significant dates throughout the year were also introduced, starting in early 2021. Educational sessions on diversity, inclusion and accessibility have also been provided across many departments and branches of the Corporation, as well as externally through speaking engagements and articles profiling Regional initiatives.

As part of Inclusion initiatives and honouring Inclusion Charter commitments, the Region provided Indigenous-focused vaccination supports

York Region planned two vaccination clinics specifically designated for Indigenous Peoples and supported staff to provide an inclusive and accessible environment at immunization sites by developing training videos and tip sheets on Indigenous engagement, inclusion, and accessibility for front-line immunization staff. York Region also worked with an Indigenous agency to write communications/promotional materials in a culturally sensitive manner, organized and coordinated smudging to be available at the clinics for those interested, and facilitated the presence of elders and knowledge keepers from the Indigenous community to be on site and respond to questions about the vaccines.

Inclusion Charter provided foundation for initiatives to commemorate National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

As part of activities to honour the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, York Region supported staff education, awareness and reflection through education sessions for allies focused on Indigenous history, truth and reconciliation, along with resources and training materials available to staff on a portal page dedicated to Indigenous inclusion and engagement. A virtual sharing circle for Indigenous staff was also held, providing a space to gather and share.

The Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group will be moving forward on developing and implementing a collective action plan to achieve the vision of the Charter within organizations and in the community

The Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group is committed to fostering inclusion through a collective action plan that will address two priority areas, increasing the sense of community belonging amongst York Region residents and decreasing the incidence of hate crimes. Work had started on developing an external education and awareness campaign to address these two priority areas, however the project was put on hold to focus on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dedicated efforts on the collective action plan will be reinitiated in 2022, contingent on resources and capacity of member organizations.

Despite the pandemic, the Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group continued to meet virtually to share information, resources and supports. Resources, including possible strategies and tactics, to increase awareness of the Inclusion Charter within member organizations were developed and provided to members. The Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group has also been supporting the roll-out of a public-facing diversity calendar to raise awareness about faith, cultural and significant dates, and an inclusive language guide to support the use of more inclusive and respectful language.

Beyond Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group members, endorsement of the Inclusion Charter is expanding

As of September 2021, 35 organizations have endorsed the Charter, including 15 organizations not currently members of the Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group. Endorsees now include members of the Community Partnership Council and Human Services Planning Board of York Region. Additional endorsements are expected as relationships expand through community development. To support this expansion, York Region launched a community of practice for Inclusion Charter endorsees to provide networking opportunities for endorsees who are not part of the Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group. Additional benefits and actions for the community of practice will be explored in 2022.

York Region continues to build on the strong partnership with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, and supported the launch of CIFAL York

In 2017, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) recognized the Charter as a leading practice model that communities around the world could use to become more inclusive and established a partnership with the Region, York University and York Regional Police to foster and support collaborative actions.

In 2021, York Region participated in [the opening](#) of Canada's first [Centre International de Formation des Acteurs Locaux \(CIFAL\) at York University's Markham Centre Campus](#), a key outcome of the partnership with UNITAR. The Centre will provide innovative training and serve as hub for the exchange of knowledge among government, private sector, academic and civil society partners. Further actions emerging from the partnership, including those focused on sustainable development goals and interfaith and intercultural dialogue, will continue in 2022.

The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee supports inclusion by helping ensure accessibility of Regional programs, services and facilities

An accessible York Region is an important part of achieving the vision of the Inclusion Charter. Amidst the pandemic, Committee meetings transitioned to a virtual, accessible format and the Committee continued to advise on Regional initiatives. The Committee also participated in consultations, including a community needs survey, to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities and to help inform pandemic planning activities.

In 2021, the Region's Accessibility Advisory Committee and those of the local municipalities came together to celebrate National AccessAbility Week, focusing on the theme "Leaving No One Behind." This event was an opportunity for committee members to collaborate and collectively explore resources and tools to support consultations on the inclusive design of public spaces. The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee Professional Development Forum was held in October as follow-up event to provide more professional development opportunities for members.

York Region will continue to leverage other opportunities to advance the Inclusion Charter

In addition to actions already identified in this memorandum, program enhancements to the [Region's Community Investment Fund](#) will help advance the Inclusion Charter. As part of program changes, the Fund will target investments to respond to the needs of priority groups including Indigenous, Black and other racialized populations, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S) communities, newcomers, people living with disabilities, and people residing in focus areas aligned with the [Community Safety and Well-being Plan](#).

The York Region Local Immigration Partnership, focused on promoting the social and economic integration of newcomers, and the Community Partnership Council that supports the program are also advancing the vision of the Inclusion Charter. [Recent program activities](#) include the "Opening Doors to Newcomers" workshops, which featured a presentation on identifying and addressing hate crimes delivered by York Regional Police, and the development of a newcomer guide to help individuals and families settle successfully in York Region.

As the important and difficult work of the Inclusion Charter continues, additional resourcing will be required to support actions in the corporation and community

A request for additional staffing (three temporary resources initially) will be brought forward for Council consideration as part of the upcoming Budget process. Inclusion Charter activities have, to date, been supported by existing resources, mainly staff focused on the implementation of legislated and regulatory requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. However, the work, and the need and opportunities ahead, have expanded beyond the capacity of current resources.



Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



Bruce Macgregor
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments (1)
eDOCS #13303809