

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Date: March 17, 2022

Re: Social Service Response to COVID-19 Global Pandemic:
Q4 2021 - Q1 2022 Update and Highlights of Actions Since Spring 2020

In [April 2020](#), Committee of the Whole received a report on the Region's Social Service Response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Update memos were provided in [May 2020](#), [June 2020](#), [July 2020](#), [September 2020](#), [November 2020](#), [April 2021](#) and [October 2021](#).

As we move towards reopening and recovery and continue to adjust programs to incorporate the realities of living with COVID-19, this memorandum provides a final update on the Region's social service response to the pandemic. This memorandum includes updates on trends and recent activities from Q4 2021 and Q1 2022, as well as a summary of actions since the social service response to the pandemic began. Information from Paramedic and Seniors Services not otherwise included in regular updates to Regional Council by the Medical Officer of Health is included in this memo.

The Region's Social Service Response to the pandemic has the following goals:

1. Monitor current and emerging trends
2. Adapt and enhance core services to meet growing and evolving community needs
3. Leverage community partnerships to support vulnerable groups
4. Support economic stability for our most vulnerable residents
5. Pivot to respond to additional community needs
6. Obtain provincial and federal funding commitments to support activities

Provincial/Federal program changes and resident needs since Q4 2021

The Province has been gradually easing restrictions under its Roadmap to Reopen

On January 5, 2022, time-limited measures through a [modified Step Two](#) were implemented to ease transmission of the Omicron variant, and to prevent hospitals from becoming overwhelmed as efforts to rollout booster doses and immunization of 5 to 11-year-olds continued. The plan was guided by ongoing assessment of key public health and health care indicators and supported by local or regional tailored responses to COVID-19. Following this, the Province announced a series of cautious and gradual easing of public health measures that began on [January 31, 2022](#), with further easing of measures taking effect on [February 17, 2022](#), and again on March 1, 2022 where the proof of vaccination requirements was lifted for all settings.

As of March 14, 2022, mandatory vaccination policies ended. Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health also stated the province will go on to remove most masking requirements starting March 21, 2022, except for select settings such as public transit, health care settings, long-term care homes and congregate care settings. Additionally, the Reopening Ontario Act (ROA) expires on March 28, 2022, and the remaining masking requirements in all settings along with any remaining emergency orders will be revoked as of April 27, 2022.

Major federal income supports have ended December 2021

As of December 2021, the federal government ended various COVID-19 support measures, while other programs were extended in recognition of uneven economic reopening across regions and sectors.

The following programs have closed:

- The [Canada Recovery Benefit](#) (CRB) stopped accepting applications on December 23, 2021
- The [Canada Emergency Response Benefit](#) (CERB) closed applications on December 2, 2021

The following programs were extended:

- The eligibility period for the [Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy](#) and the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and Lockdown Support was extended to January 27, 2022
- The [Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit](#) and the [Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit](#) was extended to May 7, 2022

The federal government has not indicated its intention to further extend these programs.

Health-related inquiries continue to make up the majority of resident calls to Access York and 211/Findhelp

Health-related concerns remained the largest category of resident inquiries to Access York and 211/Findhelp from September 2021 to February 2022. The volume and proportion of inquiries to Access York peaked at 28,217 (82% of total) calls in December as the Omicron variant took hold and declined to the lowest level in six months to 6,555 (48% of total) calls in February. In comparison, during the previous six months, the lowest volume of health-related calls was 10,079 (58% of total) in August 2021, and the peak was reached in June 2021 with 56,503 (92%) calls – the highest volume of health-related inquiries during the entire pandemic period.

Highlights of emergency response initiatives since Q4 2021, including supports to address needs during the Omicron wave

York Region continues to operate Self-Isolation and Transitional Shelters to provide a range of supports to meet the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness

The Provincial Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) was used to support the continuation of the temporary Self-Isolation and Transitional Shelters opened in 2020 as part of York Region's COVID-19 response.

The Self-Isolation Shelter's capacity was increased from 11 beds to 22 beds in December 2021 in response to the increased demand for isolation spaces during the Omicron wave. The 80 bed Transitional Shelter has historically been at or near capacity but has recently begun to decrease. Both Shelters are fully funded by the Province.

York Region launched the Cold Weather Response Plan for 2021-2022 to provide safe and welcoming spaces for people experiencing homelessness during the cold weather season, with further adjustments to ensure clients remained safe. As of March 14, 2022, the Region activated the Cold Weather Response Plan for 58 days in winter 2021/22 compared to 52 days in winter 2020/2021.

York Region partnered with Peel Region to facilitate service for York Region residents needing to self-isolate

As part of the provincial [High Priority Communities Strategy](#), the Region successfully established and operated a COVID-19 Voluntary Isolation Centre (the "Centre") from January to June 2021. In conjunction with the end of Provincial funding and reflective of reduced demand due to decreasing case numbers, the Centre closed June 30, 2021.

Following closure of the Centre, York Region partnered with Peel Region so York Region residents needing to self-isolate could access Peel Region's COVID-19 Voluntary Isolation Housing. As of February 16, 2022, 184 York Region residents have used the Peel centre. The Peel isolation centre is scheduled to close March 31, 2022.

Children's Services continues to provide critical supports to families and childcare and EarlyON operators

In Q1 2022, in response to a request from the Ministry of Education, Children's Services opened 10 Emergency Child Care sites so that school aged children of health care and other front-line workers had access to free emergency childcare. In total, 263 children attended emergency childcare. Costs were fully funded by the Province. These sites are now closed.

On January 5, 2022, the Ministry of Education informed Child Care and Early Years Service System Managers they would be required to distribute Rapid Antigen Tests to community-based childcare programs. Children's Services with support from Corporate Services is receiving shipments and coordinating distribution of these tests to 301 community-based childcare sites. At this time it is unknown how long the Region will be required to provide this service.

EarlyON programs are offering a combination of limited indoor programming as well as virtual and outdoor programs following Public Health guidelines. These programs provide families with resources and networks to support healthy child development.

The Region continues to support community housing providers, tenants, and cooperative members

The Region secured approximately \$5.2 million in Federal/Provincial funding for community housing providers, including Housing York Inc., under the [COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream](#) of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. The funding will be used to support pandemic-resilient capital projects including reconfiguration of site offices and implementation of health and safety measures to support physical distancing.

The COVID-19 In-Situ program ended in December 2021. The program provided market rent households living in community housing with a short-term rent benefit to address income decreases. Since its launch in early 2020, 25 households received assistance to avoid eviction. Housing providers are referring tenants and cooperative members to other available housing stability support programs should they continue to experience difficulty paying rent.

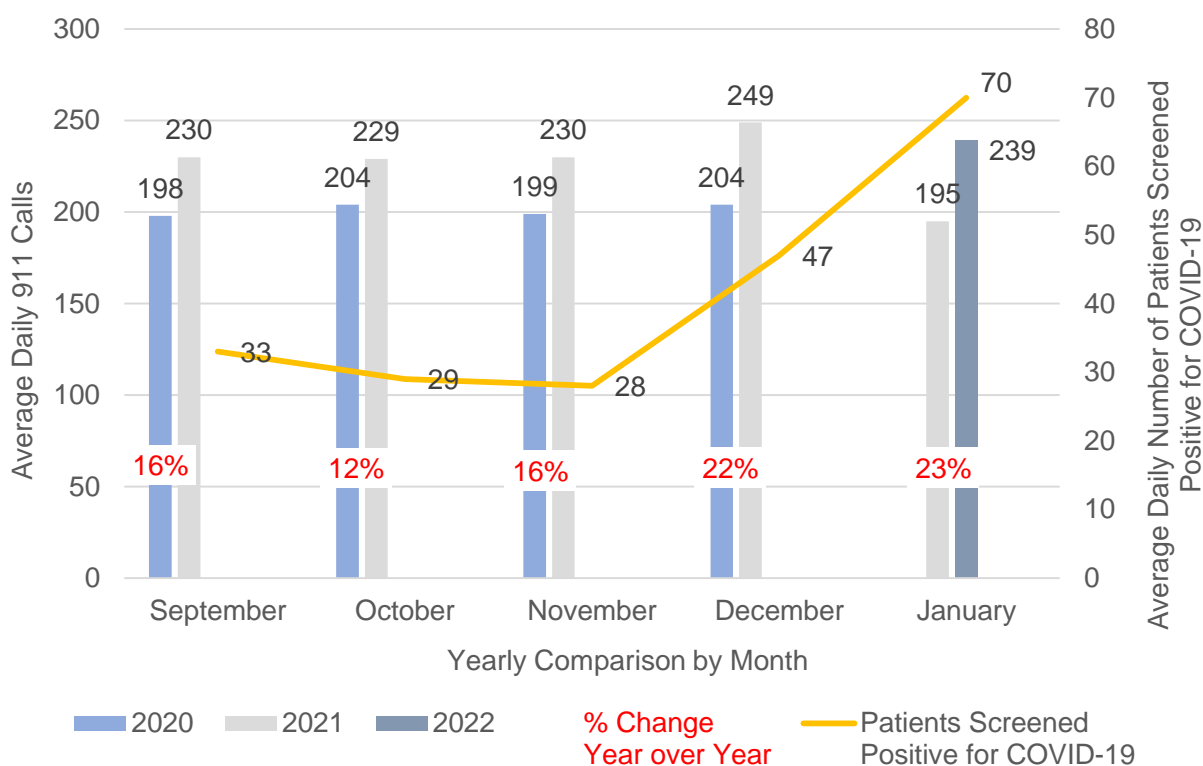
The Region continued to provide virtual programming and support services to community housing residents. This included wellness checks, partnering with Rexall to deliver COVID-19 vaccine booster clinics, delivering resiliency kits to vulnerable families, and partnering with Vaughan Community Health Centre to deliver Rapid Antigen Kits to seniors' sites.

Paramedic Services continued to experience higher call volumes, and increasing number of patients screening positive during the Omicron surge

Figure 1 shows the average number of daily 9-1-1 calls received between September 2020 and January 2021, and between September 2021 and January 2022. Similar to timing of the Omicron surge, the largest increase in daily 9-1-1 calls occurred in December 2021 and January

2022. The number of patients who screened positive for COVID-19 on emergency calls also increased in December 2021 and January 2022.

Figure 1
Average Daily 9-1-1 Calls and Average Daily Number of Patients Screened Positive for COVID-19 Between September 2021 and January 2022



Year over year, calls from private residences increased by about 10% during the period from September to December 2021. In January 2022 there were 20% more calls from private residences than there were in January 2021. Similarly calls from long-term care and retirement homes increased 28% during the period from September to December 2021, and in January 2022 there were 26% more calls than January 2021.

Paramedics continued to support congregate settings (emergency housing, group homes, etc.) and first responders (paramedics, fire, and police services) with surveillance testing and vaccinations as follows:

- Collected specimens for 2,532 PCR tests between October 2021 and February 2022. As of March 15, 2022, demand for PCR testing has decreased due to greater access to and increased use of rapid antigen tests in the community

- Vaccinated 1,086 residents and 59 staff in congregate settings between October 2021 and February 2022

Community paramedics continued to provide health care supports through the CP@Clinic program for 207 new clients between October 2021 and February 2022.

York Region's two Long-Term Care Homes dealt with further outbreaks related to the Omicron variant and continue to offer residents fourth doses

Like most long-term care homes in Ontario, the Region's two Homes were impacted by the Omicron surge. A COVID-19 outbreak was declared at Newmarket Health Centre on December 29, 2021, with 68 staff cases and 21 resident cases (including two deaths) as of February 22, 2022. The outbreak was declared over at Newmarket Health Centre on March 14, 2022. A COVID-19 outbreak was also declared at Maple Health Centre on January 2, 2022, with 49 staff cases and 7 resident cases as of February 17, 2022. The outbreak was declared over at Maple Health Centre on February 17, 2022.

The Region's two Homes continue to offer eligible residents a fourth dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. As of March 16, 2022, 79% (143) of eligible residents have received four doses across both homes.

The Region's Adult Day Programs resumed in-person programming and implemented screening and testing requirements

Adult Day Programs at Maple and Keswick resumed in-person programming between August and October 2021. A hybrid model of in-person and virtual programming continues to be offered in response to physical distancing requirements and some clients' hesitancy to attend in-person programming. To support clients during COVID-19 waves, a hold list was created in February 2022 to allow clients the flexibility to pause their attendance due to pandemic concerns without losing their priority placement when they choose to return.

The programs also implemented a testing and screening program to provide further protection to clients and employees. No outbreaks have been declared at any of the Adult Day Programs as of March 16, 2022.

Due to the Omicron surge, the Psychogeriatric Resource Consultants also returned to providing services virtually. This program supports staff in all 29 long-term care homes throughout York Region. Supports include education and consultation on effective techniques for dealing with residents with dementia, mental health, and other neurological conditions. The program also provides ongoing individualized education, case consultation and mentorship to build staff capacity at each home.

Enhanced Community Investment funding continues to provide additional support to community agencies to address COVID-19 needs

As part of the Region's 2022 budget, Council approved an additional one-time \$1 million in Community Investment funding to help address COVID-19 needs. As of Q1 2022, approximately \$800,000 has been allocated to community agencies to continue to address critical needs, including those related to food security, mental health and housing. The balance of the funds will be used to respond to any escalated or emergent needs as the year unfolds.

York Region continues to work with United Way Greater Toronto to manage the COVID-19 Community Coordination (3C) Initiative to help community agencies respond to emerging needs

The 3C initiative has played a critical role in helping coordinate and mobilize community response to emerging needs of marginalized residents, including people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, those living with food insecurity, and seniors. Examples include:

- coordinating efforts and funding to support longer-term housing options and supports
- developing strategies to address system and resource gaps throughout the pandemic
- providing technology tools and supports to seniors to assist with social isolation
- increasing home meal delivery programs to families and individuals

3C has also supported a Service Partners table through the provision of tools, resources and information sharing to increase the capacity of community service providers across the Region.

Updates on Provincial funding to support COVID-19 response

York Region's Paramedic Services received and spent \$4.5 million in Provincial funding in 2021 for COVID-19 response

The following Provincial funding was received and spent:

- \$3.3 million for Paramedic Services extraordinary expenses such as materials, primarily personal protective, and eligible payroll costs
- \$0.5 million for Community Paramedicine vaccine expansion in response to COVID-19 and annual flu season, including staffing, supplies, and training
- \$0.4 million for Paramedic Services' support for Public Health mass immunization initiative

- \$0.3 million for implementation of a centralized Incident Management System for emergency health services. The funding covers the cost of a dedicated ambulance for patient transfers between January and March 2021

York Region's Long-Term Care Program received and spent \$12.8 million in Provincial funding in 2021 for COVID-19 response

The following Provincial funding was received and spent:

- \$8.8 million for infection containment and emergency outbreak and support for personal protective equipment and supplies for seniors' programs
- \$3.2 million for infection containment and emergency outbreak. This reflects funding for 2020 recognized in 2021 due to timing of receipt
- \$0.8 million for wage enhancement for Personal Support Workers in long-term care homes and seniors' community programs. This reflects an additional three dollars per hour for eligible workers

York Region is expected to receive additional Social Services Relief Fund funding from the Province

Since the start of the pandemic, the Province has provided Social Services Relief Fund operating and capital funding to York Region (details are provided in Table 1).

At the Ontario Housing and Affordability Summit on January 19, 2022, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing announced additional funding would be provided when the current phase of funding ends. This additional, fifth phase of funding is intended to ensure Service Managers can continue offering vital services that were established to address the impacts of COVID-19 and enable an orderly wind-down of programs as provincial funds come to an end.

York Region anticipates being notified of the additional Social Services Relief Fund Phase 5 allocation soon.

Table 1
Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) Overview

Phase	Purpose	Allocation Received (\$ Millions)	Funding Conditions
SSRF Phase One	Supported a range of vulnerable populations, including people living in community housing, people with low incomes, social assistance recipients, and those experiencing homelessness. Funding was used	4.98 (Mar. 2020)	Operating projects only All funds spent as of November 2020

	to deliver variety of supports and services, including emergency housing and shelter supports (e.g., Self Isolation Shelter and Transitional Shelter)		
SSRF Phase Two	Expanded the eligible uses of funding, with a focus on resiliency to future waves of COVID-19	16.55 (8.42 in Oct 2020 and 8.13 in Dec. 2020)	Capital projects were eligible expenses in both allocations of Phase 2 funding Region spent all operating funding as of December 31, 2021 (Note: the two transitional housing projects received an extension to March 2022)
SSRF Phase Three	Facilitate continuation of Phase Two operating projects to maintain and improve infection prevention and control measures in congregate living settings and ensure stability in homelessness sector by continuing current supports	10.77 (Mar. 2021)	Operating projects only All funds spent as of December 31, 2021
SSRF Phase Four	Continue vital services that were established to address the impacts of COVID-19	10.10 (Aug. 2021)	Operating funding must be spent by March 31, 2022 Capital projects must be committed by December 31, 2021 and completed by March 31, 2023
SSRF Phase Five	Details not received as of March 16, 2022		
Total (as of March 16, 2022)		42.4	

Looking ahead to reopening and recovery

Over the past two years, the Region has adapted its services and implemented a number of measures to respond to the needs of vulnerable residents

York Region staff monitored community trends and needs, prioritized resources where needed most, leveraged existing resources, partnerships and community assets, and coordinated with stakeholders to adjust, enhance or introduce new services to address the needs of vulnerable people. Highlights and outcomes of social service response activities delivered since the pandemic started are noted in Attachment 1.

Regional staff will continue to monitor trends and community needs, and will be prepared to respond to future waves

What we learned over the past two years will help the Region respond to issues as COVID-19 moves into an endemic state. Emergency programs and initiatives can be activated or scaled up to address critical needs as they arise. Community partnerships and linkages to other organizations, including relationships with provincial ministries and agencies, established during this pandemic will continue to enhance the Region's capacity to monitor and respond to resident and community needs.

Regional staff will continue to review program adjustments introduced as part of pandemic response, and helpful innovations and partnerships are anticipated to be part of delivery models going forward

The pandemic has required program modifications to sustain services, ensure they operate safely, and in some cases, escalated to respond to community and resident needs. This includes virtual programming, electronic tools to support service delivery, and more flexible program features to enable timely and nimble response. These approaches will be leveraged going forward where they enhance access to programs and the customer service experience.

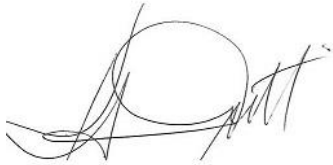
The pandemic response has also provided opportunities to deepen and establish new relationships with community partners to coordinate on critical issues; these collaborative initiatives are expected to continue to support response and recovery efforts and help inform Regional plans and strategies going forward. The Region's Community Investment Fund will also remain available to help community agencies address critical gaps in services.

There remains much uncertainty on the path ahead, and continued resources will be required to stabilize and sustain Regional programs and services

The incidence and severity of any new variants and future pandemic waves, or a long-lasting endemic, and their impacts on communities and residents, are unclear. Programs and services to help vulnerable residents will continue to be critical as needs have become, and are expected to remain, high and complex. While pandemic-related funding, such as the Social Services Relief Fund, provide some assistance to continue with critical services and help wind-down

certain programs, these are time-limited. Long-term funding for supports, such as the transitional shelter and other initiatives to prevent and address homelessness, will be needed.

Regional staff will continue to monitor and support advocacy efforts for sufficient and sustained senior government funding for social services. There are opportunities ahead as the Province moves forward with system transformation, including in employment supports, social assistance, long-term care, and health services delivery.



Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



Bruce Macgregor
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment (1)
eDOCS #13542448