

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Community and Health Services
May 4, 2023

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Community Investment Fund – Recommended Priorities

1. Recommendations

1. Council approve the following priorities for York Region’s Community Investment Fund program for this term of Council:
 - a. Housing Stability
 - b. Mental Well-being
 - c. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - d. Food Security System Development
 - e. Organizational Development and Capacity Building for Community Agencies
 - f. Other critical service and emergency needs, and needs identified in Regional human services plans, such as the Community Safety and Well-being Plan for York Region
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to Clerks of local municipalities and Human Services Planning Board of York Region.

2. Summary

In [October 2021](#) Council-approved a revised framework for the Community Investment Fund. Investment priorities that guide Community Investment Fund program activities must be updated and approved by Council during each new Council term. This report seeks approval for Investment Priorities for this term of Council.

Key Points:

- The Community Investment Fund is an important part of York Region’s human services system, addressing gaps in community needs through targeted, time-limited, funding to local initiatives delivered by community agencies

- Recommended investment priorities were identified through research and consultation, and align with key Regional plans, including the Strategic Plan
- Recommended investment priorities include: housing stability; mental well-being; diversity, equity and inclusion; food security system development; and organizational development and capacity building for community agencies
- Recommended investment priorities relate to, and are interconnected with, social determinants of health
- In addition to identified priorities, the Community Investment Fund can be leveraged to respond to critical or emergency community needs and to support delivery of other Regional human services priorities
- Additional Community Investment funding was included in the increased funding for critical social infrastructure approved by Regional Council in [February 2023](#)

3. Background

Through the Community Investment Fund, York Region supports community agencies to deliver local initiatives that address human service gaps and complement Regional services

The Region has many mandates and programs for the delivery of human services, but it is only one player in the broader system. For example, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada leads delivery of settlement services to newcomers, and responsibility for planning, funding, administration and delivery of employment services falls under WCG, the Provincially designated Service System Manager for employment supports in York Region.

The Community Investment Fund helps the Region deliver on its core services, while providing time-limited funding to help address gaps in the human services sector. Through partnership with the local community agency sector, the Region benefits from agencies' familiarity with local community needs, expertise supporting specific populations and existing service infrastructure.

The Community Investment Fund emphasizes preventative and early-intervention approaches which help to divert residents from more costly programs. Components of the program, as approved by Council in [October 2021](#), include:

- Broad focus to support residents from a variety of under-represented and marginalized groups, including Indigenous, Black and other racialized populations, newcomers, residents living with low income, and seniors
- Multiple methods to identify and select initiatives for funding, including call for proposal and direct selection

- Time-limited funding to deliver community-based services (not core operational expenses or capital projects)
- Ability to direct external funding to human services initiatives
- Authorization for the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to approve projects and funding allocations based on priorities set by Council

Additional information about the Community Investment Fund is available on the program's [webpage on York.ca](#).

Current Community Investment funding is focused on pandemic response and recovery, implementation of York Region's Community Safety and Well-being Plan, and other critical human services priorities

The Community Investment Fund had a critical role in the Region's social services response to the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to do so in the recovery period. Throughout the pandemic, the program helped community agencies to pivot funded projects to safely continue delivering services and meeting emerging needs. In 2022 and 2023, funding is allocated to community agencies to deliver projects as part of system-wide pandemic recovery (see Appendix A for additional details on 2022 program activity). The program recently completed a call for proposal process that resulted in 18 community initiatives being funded in 2023 to address mental health issues created or made worse during the pandemic.

Supporting implementation of the [Community Safety and Well-being Plan for York Region](#) is another area of focus, with allocations provided to support Community Action Tables and fund projects to implement the Community Safety and Well-being Plan. A full update on the delivery of the Community Safety and Well-being Plan for York Region will be provided to Council later this year.

Time-limited funding is being provided to transition current projects and mitigate disruptions to community services

In 2023, some program funding is being allocated to agencies to transition projects that were funded under the previous Community Investment Fund framework whose service terms have come to an end. This transitional support helps provide stability for community agencies and services for residents, and gives time for agencies to consider next steps. Program staff will support affected agencies to identify alternative funding sources, and agencies are able to apply for future funding opportunities available through the Community Investment Fund.

Council approved additional funding for the Community Investment Fund to support critical social infrastructure

In [February 2023](#), Committee of the Whole recommended that staff be directed to bring a report to Council regarding the implementation of additional funding to be applied towards the Community Investment Fund, homelessness, mental health and housing. In response, staff developed proposed investments and projects reflecting an increase of approximately

\$12.8 million to the Community and Health Services budget starting in 2023. As shared with Council in [February 2023](#), proposed investments were based on the following criteria:

- Must address critical community needs relating to priorities outlined by Committee of the Whole on February 9, 2023: homelessness, housing, and community investment needs, which include mental health and human trafficking
- Must address a specific service gap while ensuring the Region is not taking ownership of a new service area that falls within the mandate of another level of government (i.e., provincial mandate)
- Must produce specific and measurable outcomes for residents in alignment with objectives and performance measures included in Regional plans

Approximately \$3.2 million of this funding is being allocated through the Community Investment Fund to address specific gaps in critical community services including mental health, homelessness prevention, and human trafficking supports. The additional funding will enable continued support for some long-term Region-funded initiatives identified as of critical importance to Regional core programming, such as eviction prevention and mobile and outreach supports for those experiencing homelessness. Of the 18 community initiatives funded in 2023 to address mental health issues created or made worse during the pandemic mentioned earlier, six were possible because of this additional funding.

4. Analysis

Recommended investment priorities are informed by research and consultation with community partners

Recommended investment priorities have been developed in consultation with partners and supported by research, data and evidence obtained from a variety of sources, including meetings with community agencies to discuss sector trends and service gaps, review and analysis of project reporting and funding proposals, and participation on collaborative tables such as the Human Services Planning Board of York Region.

Recommended investment priorities will address service gaps in housing stability, mental well-being, and diversity, equity and inclusion, support development of the local food sector, enable additional organizational capacity building, and address other priority and emergency needs

The recommended investment priorities are as follows:

- Housing Stability
- Mental Well-being
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

- Food Security System Development
- Organizational Development and Capacity Building for Community Agencies
- Other critical service and emergency needs, and needs identified in Regional human services plans

Individual health and well-being is complex and influenced by many factors. The recommended investment priority areas all relate to, and are interconnected with, social determinants of health. Social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. For example, not having access to safe or suitable housing may negatively impact an individual's mental well-being. As reported to Council in [January 2017](#), social determinants of health are estimated to account for 50% of individual health outcomes.

Housing affordability continues to be a challenge in York Region and throughout the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area

It has become increasingly difficult for many residents to find housing that is right for them at a price they can afford. There is a growing gap between market rents in York Region and available income through social assistance and other government benefits. Across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, York Region has the highest proportion of households spending 30% or more of their income on housing costs. In [February 2021](#), Council declared a housing affordability crisis in York Region.

Housing is one of the most important social and economic determinants of health. When housing is unaffordable, residents have less money to spend on other needs and are less resilient to personal economic crisis, which could lead to homelessness.

With a focus on Housing Stability, the Community Investment Fund will support community projects and initiatives that support residents to obtain and keep housing. Examples of services that could be funded under this priority area include, eviction prevention services, housing search, education on tenant rights, and landlord-tenant mediation supports.

In York Region, mental well-being is identified as a top-risk to community safety and well-being in York Region's [Community Safety and Well-being Plan](#)

Mental well-being influences how we think, behave, relate to and interact with one another. The COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on mental health and well-being of individuals across Canada, with concerns about the virus compounded by disruption of daily life and reduced access to services and supports. According to the [Canadian Red Cross](#), while society continues to show signs of recovery, mental health and well-being impacts of the pandemic are expected to persist.

There are several mental health-related service gaps in the community, including supports not always being available when needed and a lack of awareness or ability to navigate services. Example indicators of this include how in 2020, York Regional Police Mental Health Support Team responded to 7,062 mental health-related calls, a 40% increase from 2016.

Additionally, the Region's 2021 homelessness point-in-time count found the rates of mental health issues among people experiencing homelessness increased 16% since 2018.

Although the Government of Ontario is responsible for mental health services in the province, funding in this area is insufficient to meet growing needs, [according to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#). This results in greater pressure on Regional services such as housing, homelessness and emergency services. While the Region and other partners work to advance advocacy to the Province for additional and sustained funding in this area, service gaps persist in our communities today. The intention is not to replace or duplicate Provincial responsibility in this area, but to complement and enhance investments made by other levels of government or pilot initiatives that other funders can possibly take up.

With a focus on Mental Well-being, the Community Investment Fund will support community projects and initiatives that help residents to have positive mental health. Examples of services that could be funded under this priority area include, system navigation, trauma-informed crisis counselling, peer supports, and mentoring.

York Region is one of the fastest growing and most diverse communities in Canada

As of 2021, approximately 1.2 million people call York Region home, speaking over 120 different languages and coming from over 230 distinct ethnic origins. Approximately 55% of residents identify as a visible minority and nearly 48% of residents are born outside of Canada. In addition, nearly one in five York Region residents have at least one disability.

Social factors, such as immigration status or racial identification, play a critical role in the social determinants of health. These factors affect the social interactions that shape and influence how people are born, grow, live, work and age. This can result in inequities that affect peoples' chances of achieving and maintaining good health over their lifetimes, including barriers in accessing and receiving services and supports. In Canada, health inequities exist, are persistent and in some cases growing. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the disproportionate and unequal impact socioeconomic crises can have on people, often delineated along immigration-status, gender, racial and ethnic lines. These, and related, challenges exist in York Region, as indicated by recent [York Regional Police Hate Crime data](#) that noted a 42% increase in reported hate crime incidents from 2017 to 2021.

As enshrined in the [Inclusion Charter for York Region](#) the Region is committed to ensuring York Region is a welcoming and inclusive community where diversity is celebrated and everyone can develop to their full potential, participate freely in society, and live with respect dignity and freedom from discrimination. With a focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the Community Investment Fund will help the Region to advance the vision of its Inclusion Charter by supporting community projects and initiatives targeted to specific marginalized groups, helping to mitigate inequities in the human services system and to tailor supports and services responsive to the unique needs of York Region's diverse communities. Example of services that could be funded under this priority area include social inclusion programming, and projects that are designed and delivered by, and targeted towards, equity-seeking groups.

The system for the collection, distribution, and access to food for people facing food insecurity in York Region requires modernization to better support residents

Food insecurity refers to not having, or concern about not having, enough food to eat due to lack of income. In Ontario, one in six households were food insecure in 2021, with 259,000 households experiencing severe food insecurity, meaning family members missed meals, reduced their intake of food or went days without eating due to lack of income. As of 2020, approximately one in 10 York Region residents live with low income and may struggle to pay for life's basic necessities including housing, utilities, and food. About 18% of children in York Region live in low-income families. When families cannot afford to buy healthy, nutritious, food, it often impacts other aspects of their mental and physical health.

While local food banks, pantries, and emergency food programs exist to help mitigate food insecurity concerns, these organizations often operate independently from one another, struggle with labour and operational challenges due to reliance on volunteers, and are challenged in properly maintaining and distributing fresh and/or frozen foods.

Additional concerns are related to operational hours, demand for service (particularly among first-time clients), service boundaries, funding distribution, stigma (reluctance among some residents to access food supports despite needing them), and opportunities to strengthen collaboration among service providers. Alternative models that show promise are operating in Ontario in regions such as Waterloo and Toronto. In these regions, the local food system is centralized through a "hub and spoke" model where a central agency acts as a main collector and distributor of food to local food banks, pantries, and programs.

With a focus on Food Security System Development, the Community Investment Fund will explore opportunities to strengthen York Region's food system in areas such as collaboration, integration, and centralized distribution of food, including culturally appropriate food that meet the diverse needs of our communities. Investments may support enhancements in the local food system, including food access, delivery and storage, and information exchange between providers.

Community agencies play a vital role in building healthy communities by providing critical services that positively support individuals' social determinants of health, social cohesion and community well-being

With a combination of strong community relationships and intimate local knowledge, community agencies understand the needs of their communities and the best ways to meet them.

Recent years have been challenging for the community agency sector. According to a [report released by the Ontario Nonprofit Network](#), many agencies, still reeling from the pandemic, continue to face rising inflation, increased services demand, and labour shortages, among other obstacles. While these issues affect organizations of all sizes, their impacts are often more significant for new or small agencies. Given capacity limitations, smaller and newer agencies can struggle with developing compelling grant applications, delivering successful

fundraising strategies, and making meaningful connections with others in the sector for greater and more efficient impact.

With a focus on Organizational Development and Capacity Building, the Community Investment Fund will support community agencies based in York Region to strengthen their ability to operate sustainably and deliver effective services to residents, based on their organizational needs. Example of services that could be funded under this priority area include resources to support proposal writing, effective fundraising, and strategic plan and governance development.

Community Investments will remain flexible to respond to critical and emergency human service needs and deliver on priority Regional human services plans

The program will continue to have the ability to remain flexible to respond to critical or emergency community needs and to support delivery of Regional human services priorities, such as the Community Safety and Well-being Plan. Emergency needs requiring funding support will be identified by staff and may be informed by needs that emerge from local municipalities, community agencies, and collaborative tables. Funding allocations for emergency projects will be informed by the community need, project design, and funding availability within the program.

In addition, Council could also direct staff to incorporate additional considerations and areas of focus to guide Community Investment Fund activity.

Processes to allocate funding to the community will be widely promoted

Following Council approval of this report, processes to identify and allocate funding to community projects and initiatives will be initiated. Allocating funding includes the release of public calls for proposals and use of other processes available to the Community Investment Fund, as approved by Council in [October 2021](#), such as direct selection where appropriate. These processes will also allocate funding to critical human services priorities established by Council in [February 2023](#) relating to mental health, human trafficking and homelessness prevention supports and services. These processes will be staged and will take time to complete, as they will involve several activities including engagement with community agencies, review of project details, due diligence analysis, and contract finalization.

Call for proposal processes will be publicly advertised to alert the community agency sector of funding opportunities, including through updates to the program webpage, email newsletters and social media channels.

Specific criteria for each priority area will be established that will identify the types of projects and initiatives that will be funded under the broader investment focus. Funding processes may be targeted to all Community Investment Fund [Priority Groups](#) or focused to deliver a specific set of services to a specific Priority Group population (for example, seniors).

Financial sustainability of services will continue to be considered as part of proposal evaluation, and funded agencies will be encouraged to implement financial sustainability

plans to pursue and secure alternative funding sources for their initiative, should they wish to continue to deliver it once their Community Investment Funding term has come to an end. Program staff will support agencies in this activity including through the curation and distribution of a sector newsletter that includes funding opportunities that community agencies may pursue, and the delivery of professional development opportunities, such as training on proposal writing, and fundraising. There may be services identified that are appropriate for permanent funding consideration as part of future Regional budget processes.

Collaboration with other community funders, such as United Way Greater Toronto, will continue as part of program delivery to help coordinate the funding of services across York Region and avoid duplication of efforts.

Results of funding opportunities will be publicly posted online to the Community Investment Fund [York.ca webpage](#). Annual updates on program activity will be provided to Council.

Funding to agencies will come with clear timeframes for service delivery

While the program allows for annual and multi-year funding arrangements (e.g., up to three years, depending on the project being funded), Community Investment funding is intended to be targeted, temporary and time-limited. This will be communicated to agencies looking to secure Community Investment funding to manage expectations about continued and indefinite funding.

Recommended Community Investment Fund priorities supports Strategic Plan, Vision, and Inclusion Charter objectives

The Community Investment Fund improves the quality of life of residents by enhancing access to community services. It supports the Vision goal of York Region as a place that fosters healthy living and is safe, accessible, inclusive and supportive for all residents, and the Strategic Plan priority to support community well-being. The recommended priorities noted in this report also align with other Regional plans and initiatives, including York Region's 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan, Community Safety and Well-being Plan for York Region, and the Inclusion Charter for York Region.

5. Financial

Projects identified under the priorities recommended in this report will be funded using existing Regional budget for the Community Investment program.

The Community Investment Fund has gross budget of approximately \$8.8 million for 2023, including \$3.2 million in additional funding to deliver critical mental health, human trafficking, and homelessness prevention supports and services, which was approved in [February 2023](#) by Regional Council.

The Community Investment Fund is 100% tax levy funded. The program can flow and direct funding provided to Community and Health Services Department by external partners for

community projects, such as the way the Region was able to use provincial funding under the Social Services Relief Fund between 2020 and 2022.

6. Local Impact

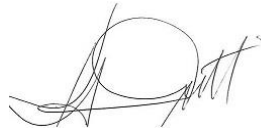
Local municipalities and community agencies across the Region were engaged in development of the recommended investment priorities. The Community Investment Fund will continue to support initiatives that respond to human service needs of vulnerable and equity-seeking residents in all nine local municipalities. Through alignment with place-based plans, such as the Community Safety and Well-being Plan for York Region, the Community Investment Fund will also help target investments to communities that would benefit most.

7. Conclusion

The Community Investment Fund is an important part of York Region’s human services system, addressing gaps in community needs through targeted, time-limited funding to local initiatives delivered by community agencies. The recommended investment priorities noted in this report will result in community services and supports that help residents to find and keep housing and have positive mental health, reduce inequities within our communities, strengthen York Region’s food security system, and foster a more sustainable and effective community agency sector.

For more information on this report, please contact Joseph Silva, Director, Strategies and Partnerships Branch at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 77201. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by:



Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Approved for Submission:



Bruce Macgregor
Chief Administrative Officer

April 20, 2023

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Appendix A – 2022 Community Investment Fund Activity Report

2022 Community Investment Fund Activity Report

The Community Investment Fund provides time-limited and targeted funding to support local projects and initiatives delivered by not-for-profit community agencies and other partners. These initiatives target gaps in the delivery of human services, complement or enhance Regional programs and deliver on policy priorities set by Regional Council. The Community Investment Fund focuses on supporting projects that address the needs of residents from marginalized and vulnerable groups that would most benefit from programs and services. Additional information about the Community Investment Fund can be found by visiting the program's [webpage on York.ca](#).

Approximately **\$6.6M** was available to support community organizations in York Region. This included **\$1M** approved in 2022 to support initiatives that addressed pandemic-related needs. 40 organizations were supported to deliver **48** programs.

INVESTMENT OUTCOMES IN 2022 ARE STRUCTURED AROUND SIX PRIORITIES.

- 1** **COMMUNITY HEALTH**
\$760K invested so residents are healthy and able to make healthy choices

- 2** **ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE**
\$1.1M invested so residents have and keep jobs that match their skills and have financial stability

- 3** **HOUSING STABILITY**
\$1.7M so residents can live in affordable, adequate and suitable housing

- 4** **SOCIAL INCLUSION**
\$960K invested so residents are connected and able to engage their communities

- 5** **PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY**
\$1M invested and **26** programs supported

- 6** **COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING**
\$80K invested to strengthen the capacity of Community Action Tables to mobilize and carry out their collective actions

Other funding was used to support other critical and emergency human services needs, such as support for response to the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis

ENABLED MORE THAN **76K** INTERVENTIONS WITH RESIDENTS, INCLUDING:



5.9K

people supported to find or retain their housing and improve their well-being



900

women and children received services to prevent and respond to family violence



63K

people in vulnerable situations accessed emergency food



2.4K

people received training and **307** secured a job



"You have done so much for us. We would not have been able to remain housed without you. Thank you especially for the referral for the clean-up of our home in time for the inspection of the landlord."

Regional Council approved

\$1M

in one-time additional funding to support pandemic response and recovery.



"Prior to this course, I was full of fear and self-doubt. When I get into this headspace, I become overwhelmed and am unable to concentrate and procrastinate. You have given me hope, confidence and the tools I needed to move forward."



5K

people supported to manage mental health and addiction challenges



1.5K

newcomers received settlement services to support their social and economic integration and well-being



43%

Community Safety and Well-Being Plan actions completed or are underway



4.9K

accessed services to reduce isolation and engage with their communities

180

community and social services stakeholders, community members or peers participated in Community Action Tables across York Region to support community development, safety and well-being.



"I am honoured to be part of the Georgina Community Action Table and a recipient of community funding, especially as a minority living in Georgina for over 20 years. My inputs are greatly valued especially around mental health wellness and could not be happier to be with this amazing team doing amazing work for our community. I feel the work Georgina CAT is doing has the potential to change the pathway for future generations to be more resilient, supportive, and inclusive if all the great plans are executed and carried through. This work can be very impactful to our Georgina Community."



"I felt isolated. I didn't have any contact with peers who were going through the same situation. It does make quite a difference for an individual to contact his peers and go through what they have gone through and give each other support. I now feel like I have the information I need to be able to cope."

**WE ARE BUILDING STRONG, SAFE, CARING COMMUNITIES,
WHERE EVERYONE THRIVES**