



To: Regional Council – Special Council Meeting
Meeting Date: November 23, 2023
From: Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services
Re: **Homelessness in York Region and Development of a Homelessness Service System Plan**

York Region is one of 47 Service Managers across Ontario responsible for planning, development, implementation and delivery of housing and homelessness services as required by the Housing Services Act, 2011. As Service Manager, the Region administers and delivers homelessness prevention and housing stability supports, including funding for community agencies to provide services. The Region is also responsible for managing emergency and transitional housing, delivered in partnership with non-profit agencies. These collective efforts are aimed at helping people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness to find and keep housing and to achieve housing stability.

A memorandum on homelessness in York Region was provided to Council in [June 2023](#). It provided current data about homelessness and poverty, and information on some key challenges and gaps in the current homelessness service system. Following its receipt, it was agreed a Special Council Meeting would be held on homelessness.

This memorandum provides information to support the November 23, 2023 Special Council Meeting on homelessness. It also provides an overview of other housing-related plans coming forward to Council in 2024.

A Homelessness Service System Plan will be developed in consultation with stakeholders as a key component of York Region’s next 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan

The purpose of the Special Council Meeting is to inform Council about the growing challenge of homelessness in York Region, actions being taken to address it, information on new approaches, and to engage on development of a Homelessness Service System Plan. The Homelessness Service System Plan will be tabled for Council consideration in Q2/Q3 2024.

The agenda for the Special Council Meeting includes the following:

- An overview of roles and responsibilities of key partners in the homelessness service system, data on current system needs and forecasted demand for services across the Region. There will be information shared on key factors that can lead to homelessness, and the importance of interconnections across the social determinants of health including economic, social, and health related considerations.
- Jim MacSween, Chief, York Regional Police, Daniele Zanotti, President and CEO, United Way Greater Toronto and Jeff Schlemmer, Executive Director, York Region's Community Legal Clinic will share their perspectives on the state of homelessness in York Region, and their experiences helping people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in York Region and Ontario.
- Dr. Stephen Hwang from St Michael's Hospital, Heather McDonald, Chief Executive Officer, LOFT Community Services, Clovis Grant, Chief Executive Officer, 360°Kids, and Michael Braithwaite, Chief Executive Officer, Blue Door will share thoughts and ideas on innovative, cost effective solutions, illustrate the importance of a collaborative, rights-based approach, and describe the importance of the community partnerships that are required to reduce homelessness.
- Information about development of the Homelessness Service System Plan, including two proposed goals (ending chronic homelessness, and strengthening a human rights based approach), and three Priority Areas of the plan (prevention and diversion, intervention and housing stability, and strengthening the systems response).
- A short video capturing perspectives from York Region residents experiencing homelessness, residents who have successfully transitioned away from homelessness and staff from community agencies working with residents to provide homelessness prevention and life stabilization supports and services.
- The session will conclude with time for Council to discuss and ask questions about homelessness, and share perspectives on development of the Homelessness Service System Plan.

Additional materials to support this meeting are included in the Appendices:

- Homelessness Roles and Responsibilities (Appendix A)
- York Region programs that provide support and services to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness (Appendix B)
- Biographies (Appendix C)

The Special Council Meeting will focus on the homelessness side of the York Region Housing Continuum

York Region has many different housing types and these can be described in a continuum, as shown in Figure 1, where there are individuals and families who:

- May be at risk of, or experiencing homelessness and who may be in emergency or transitional housing or living unsheltered in the community
- Reside in non-profit, co-operative or Housing York Inc. Community Housing
- Reside in Private Market Rental or Owned Housing, which may or may not be affordable

Figure 1
York Region Housing Continuum



While the lack of community housing and affordable private market housing are major factors in contributing to homelessness and making it difficult to help people to end their homelessness, the Special Council Meeting will focus on the homelessness side of the continuum. As described later in this memo (Table 1), affordable rental housing and community housing will be the subject of reports to Committee and Council throughout 2024. In addition, affordable housing is the focus of Council's Housing Affordability Task Force.

A Homelessness Service System Plan is under development to guide the Region's homelessness response

The Homelessness Service System Plan will be developed using a data-informed approach that will guide the Region's homelessness planning activities in the coming years. Engagement with

local municipalities, provincial ministries, community partners, and people with lived experience will be key in developing the system plan.

The Special Council meeting will initiate broader engagement work on the Homelessness Service System Plan. Some preliminary consultation has occurred to support development of the Plan, and to support the Special Council meeting. This included key informant interviews with leaders in the homelessness service system, a presentation at the Human Services Planning Board in Spring 2023, and engagement with local municipal staff through the Local Municipal Community, Health and Recreation Leaders Table.

The Federal Government and some Service Managers in Ontario have aligned their actions to specific goals, to address homelessness. York Region has identified two aspirational goals to guide the Homelessness Service System Plan and how it will be implemented. These goals will be shared at the Special Council Meeting for Council feedback:

Goal 1: End Chronic Homelessness in York Region

Chronic Homelessness is a term used to describe people who have been experiencing homelessness for six months or longer in the past year or someone who has experienced homelessness for 18+ months in the past three years.

Addressing barriers facing people experiencing chronic homelessness will help people who often have the greatest needs. As this group tends to be the highest users of services, helping them to find and keep housing sooner can reduce demand on the emergency and transitional housing system. This could enable resources to shift over time to homelessness prevention and longer term supports making the system more efficient.

Ending chronic homelessness also means that if people do experience homelessness, it is temporary in duration, and they can transition to housing stability. Success in ending chronic homelessness will be demonstrated by decreases in the number of people experiencing homelessness across York Region.

Goal 2: Use a Human Rights approach to guide decision making and service provision

A Human Rights approach requires meaningful and inclusive participation of people with lived/living experience of homelessness in the design and implementation of policies, programs, and services. A Human Rights approach will help ensure York Region's actions to address homelessness incorporate supports and services will effectively address the systemic causes and needs of people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Actions in the Homelessness Service System Plan will be organized under three priorities:

- **Prevention and Diversion for people at risk of homelessness:** The best way to end homelessness is to stop it from happening in the first place. Prevention measures, such as eviction prevention, aim to reduce the number of people that lose their homes. Diversion supports help people find safe alternative housing options that prevent them from needing emergency housing.
- **Intervention and Housing Stability for people experiencing homelessness:** Intervention and housing stability measures help people receive the resources and services they need while experiencing homelessness. Examples include access to primary care, financial assistance and life skills training.
- **Systems Response:** An effective systems response aligns policy directions across sectors where possible, to provide an integrated homelessness service system. This relies on the coordination and collaboration of service providers, helping people at-risk of or experiencing homelessness access the supports and services they need. An effective systems response allows rapid assessment of a person’s needs, mapped to the best available supports, with the goal of housing stability.

By prioritizing prevention and diversion, intervention and stability, and an integrated systems response, York Region aims to address the growing challenge of homelessness in a comprehensive and evidenced-informed way, ensuring that if and when it occurs – homelessness is a rare, brief and non-recurring event.

The Homelessness Service System Plan will guide the Region’s approach and investments on actions to reduce and prevent homelessness

Data will be presented at Council on projected needs related to homelessness in York Region. This forecasting data will support development of the Homelessness Service System Plan, inform the approach, and provide information on investments required to reduce and prevent homelessness in York Region. Staff are working with a vendor with significant expertise in developing homelessness forecasts for municipalities.

York Region’s Homelessness Community Programs are funded by the Province and York Region Tax Levy

For 2023, York Region Council approved a gross expenditure budget of \$31.8 million for programs that directly address homelessness, of which \$13.3 million is funded through the regional tax levy.

In March 2023, the Province increased total Homelessness Prevention Program funding by \$202 million. As a result, York Region’s allocation increased by \$15.8 million over the 2022/23 funding allocation of \$20.9 million, bringing the new total to \$36.7 million for fiscal 2023/24 (projected to \$10.3 million for the 2023 calendar year). This additional funding is to help address

York Region's historical underfunding from the Province, as reported in the 2021 Ontario Auditor General's Report.

As a result of the increase from the Province, the total revised 2023 budget for Homelessness Community Programs is \$42.2 million.

Needs across the housing and homelessness system will be addressed through targeted plans, which will form the next 10-year housing and homelessness plan in 2025

The Region is required by the *Housing Services Act, 2011* to develop and implement a 10-year plan to address local housing and homelessness needs. In [June 2023](#), Council received a report outlining progress in 2022 and actions for 2023 under [Housing Solutions](#), the Region's current 10-year housing and homelessness plan. While the Region has continued to make progress in advancing the goals of *Housing Solutions*, the report also outlines continued challenges across the housing continuum.

Work on the next 10-year housing and homelessness plan has begun, with a memo to Council outlining the approach for developing it planned for Q1 2024. Throughout 2024, Council will receive three distinct plans for consideration targeting specific needs within each component of the housing and homelessness system. The next 10-year housing and homelessness plan will consolidate commitments outlined in these three plans, targeted for Council's consideration later in 2025.

The three major plans supporting the next 10-year housing and homelessness plan, with their purpose and intending timing, are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Plans to Address Needs Within the Housing and Homelessness System

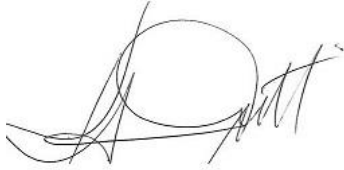
Plan	Purpose	Report Timeframe
1. Homelessness Service System Plan	Respond to immediate and long-term needs of residents experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, including exploring creating more emergency, transitional and longer-term housing options	Q2/Q3 2024
2. Community Housing Development Master Plan	Guide long-term investments to increase supply of community housing for housing providers, including Housing York Inc.	Q2/Q3 2024
3. Affordable Private Market Housing Implementation Plan	Identify actions, advocacy, and partnership approaches to address private market housing gaps in the short, medium, and long-term	Q2/Q3 2024

These plans will align with key Regional plans and policies, including the [2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan: From Vision to Results](#).

York Region will continue to partner and collaborate with community partners to respond to and address homelessness

Homelessness is a growing challenge in the Region that requires a system response. York Region staff recognize that the key to developing an effective system plan is meaningful engagement. Following the Special Council Meeting, York Region staff will continue to solicit feedback and ideas on how York Region can work with a broad range of partners to respond to homelessness and to increase stability for residents. Engagement will include people with lived experience, service delivery partners, representatives from other sectors, community agencies, and other levels of government.

For more information on this memo, please contact Kevin Pal, General Manager at 1-877-464-9675 x 72150. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



Erin Mahoney
Chief Administrative Officer

October 27, 2023

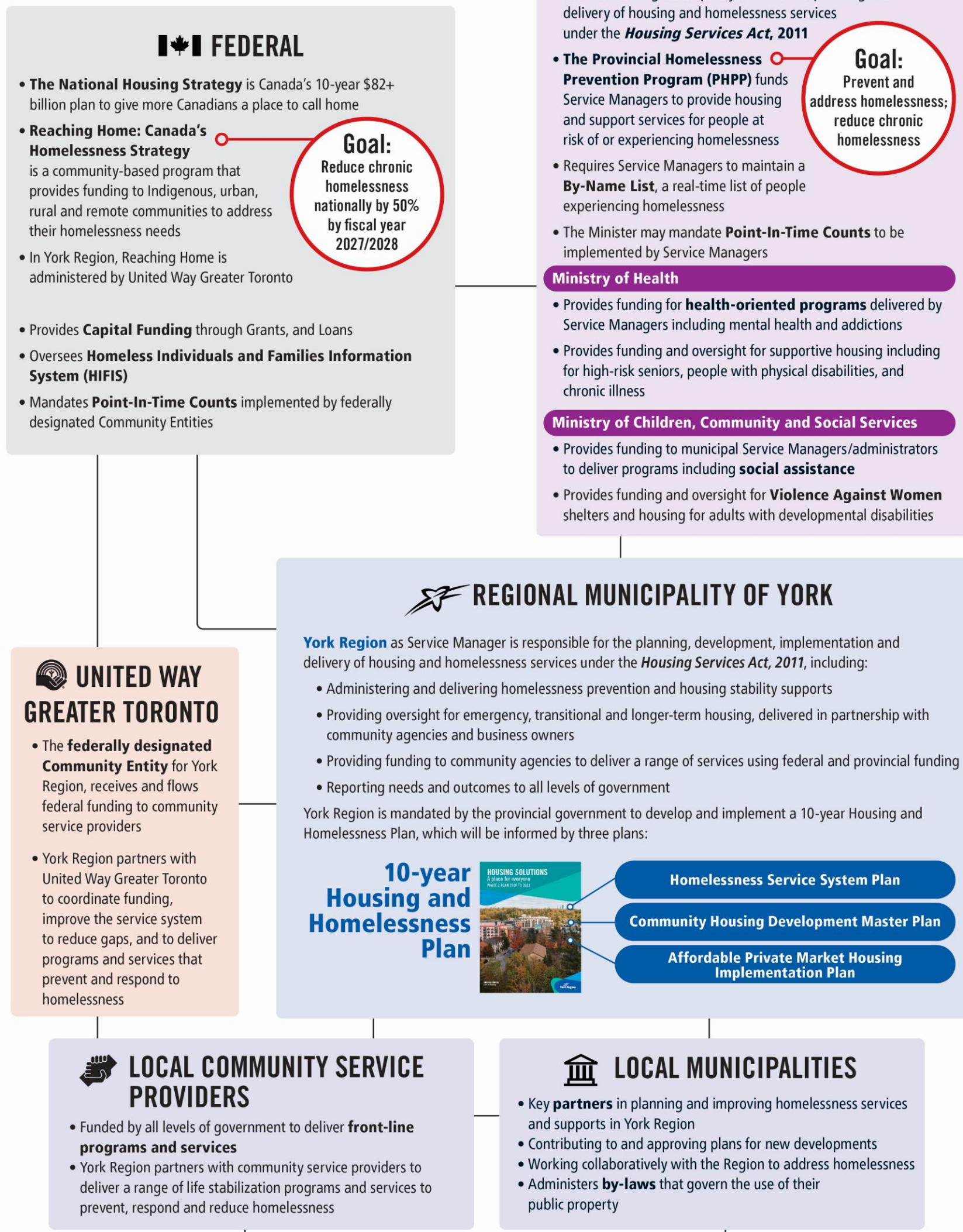
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Appendix A – Roles and Responsibilities

Appendix B – York Region programs that provide support and services to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness

Appendix C –Speaker Biographies

Roles and Responsibilities in the Homelessness Sector



Homelessness Community Programs Summary

How to get help:

- Residents in York Region who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness are encouraged to contact the York Region Emergency Housing Central Intake Line at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 76140. This phone line is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including holidays.
- For more information on available supports, please call Access York at 1-877-464-9675 Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. or visit york.ca/EmergencyHousing

Program	Description
Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP)	Provides financial assistance for rent, mortgage payments, utilities, and other housing costs, and up to six months of wraparound support to people not on provincial social assistance.
Housing Stability Program (HSP)	Provides financial assistance for rent, mortgage payments, utilities, and other housing costs, and up to six months of wraparound supports to York Region residents on provincial social assistance -- Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) -- to help people maintain stable housing.
Diversion Program	Assists people to find safe alternative options before needing to access emergency housing. The Diversion Program complements prevention and rapid re-housing services. The program provides rapid response for residents who are at imminent risk of homelessness or who may be experiencing homelessness.
Outreach Program	Provides short-term intensive case management, service navigation, referrals to health and social services, and crisis support to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to find and/or keep stable housing. Outreach staff provide support to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, where they are sheltering (e.g. encampments).

	<p>Outreach workers also collaborate with community agencies, emergency medical services, police, local municipal by-law and the public to achieve improved client outcomes including health, housing stability, personal and community safety.</p>
<p>Community Paramedicine Outreach Response Team (CPORT)</p>	<p>The Community Paramedicine Outreach Response Team (CPORT) is a partnership between the Region’s Homelessness Community Programs Outreach team and Community Paramedicine team, and two local doctors. CPORT, outreach workers and community paramedics work in partnership to provide primary care, mental health and substance use, and social supports to people where they reside, including encampments.</p>
<p>Cold Weather Response and Heat Relief Plans</p>	<p>York Region’s Cold Weather Response Plan provides safe and welcoming services for people experiencing homelessness during the cold weather season (typically November 1 to April 30, annually). Expanded services are provided to safeguard people experiencing homelessness from cold weather, alert people experiencing homelessness and other members of the public that cold weather conditions are expected or currently exist, and to support community members to take appropriate precautions.</p> <p>The Out of the Cold Seasonal Shelter Program is operated by Blue Door. This year the program runs from October 2023 to June 2024.</p> <p>York Region’s Heat Relief Plan provides expanded supports and services to people experiencing homelessness during the hot weather season, such as drop-in programs, municipal cooling centres, community meal programs, and cooling kits to help mitigate the effects of extreme heat. The inaugural Heat Relief Strategy was in effect from July 1, 2023, to September 30, 2023.</p>
<p>Drop-by / Drop-In Programs</p>	<p>Provide people who are at-risk of or experiencing homelessness with meals, personal supplies, access to shower and laundry facilities, support to find housing and obtain referrals, and warm transfers to health and other social services. York Region funds drop-by programs and operates them in partnership with community partners and local municipalities across the Region.</p>

<p>Emergency and Transitional Housing</p>	<p>York Region provides oversight and operational funding for nine emergency and transitional housing facilities delivered by community agencies that offer temporary housing, drop-in/drop-by services, case management, life stabilization support, and assistance to develop individual housing plans.</p> <p>York Region has 183 emergency housing beds and 66 transitional housing beds. Additional beds are provided when needed through the Hotel Program.</p>
<p>Home Now Program</p>	<p>Using a Housing First approach, this program provides people experiencing chronic homelessness with wrap around supports to find and keep long-term housing and remain stable in the community. Households in the Home Now program receive rent subsidies and supports to find and maintain housing, as well as wraparound supports related to mental health, substance use, budget management and employment. In a Housing First approach, access to housing is not linked to readiness or acceptance of treatment for any physical health, mental health or substance use issues. This approach acknowledges that people are more likely to experience success overcoming challenges once they have access to permanent housing.</p>
<p>Homes with Supports Program (HWS)</p>	<p>Provides supports with daily living including lodging, meals, etc., to low-income residents who may have a mental health diagnosis or are elderly and frail and are unable to live independently. York Region administers agreements and licenses for 22 Housing with Supports privately owned homes, provides financial subsidies for 392 beds and ensures compliance with York Region's Lodging Homes Bylaw. Referrals are accepted from a variety of sources, including hospitals and community agencies.</p>
<p>Homemakers and Nurses Services (HNSA)</p>	<p>Provides homemaking services and foot care to low-income residents so they can remain in their home when they have a temporary or permanent illness or disability. This program is partially funded by the Ministry of Health.</p>
<p>Integrated Support Program (ISP)</p>	<p>Provides social worker support to people with complex needs. Support can include short-term counselling, case management, and community referrals.</p>

Presenters

Daniele Zanotti, President and CEO of United Way

Daniele Zanotti was named President & CEO of United Way in June 2016. With more than 20 years of experience in the public and non-profit sectors, he has earned a reputation as an accomplished, strategic, and energetic leader.

From 2007 to 2015, Daniele served as CEO of United Way York Region, where he led the transformation of the charity from federated fundraiser to convener, mobilizer and agent of community change. In 2015, he helped establish a new regional organization, merging the United Ways in York Region and Toronto. In 2018, he led another merger between United Way Toronto and York Region with United Way Peel Region into United Way Greater Toronto.

Before joining United Way, Daniele served the community through organizations like the Rexdale Community Health Centre; The Regional Municipality of York; Family Day Care Services; and Villa Charities Foundation. He is also deeply involved outside of his professional career, volunteering his time as a member of CivicAction's Board of Directors and the City of Toronto's Partnership to Advance Youth Employment (PAYE) and Toronto's Resilience Steering Committee.



Jeff Schlemmer, Executive Director, York Region Community Legal Clinic



Jeff Schlemmer manages the York Region Community Legal Clinic as executive director, under the direction of the community Board of Directors. Jeff is a senior barrister, having practiced law for over 35 years. He was a long-time Adjunct Professor at Western University's Faculty of Law. He has volunteered extensively, including terms as Chair of a public library Board and Vice Chair of a Police Services Board. He is a keen advocate for the rights of vulnerable and disabled residents of York Region.

Jim MacSween, Chief, York Regional Police

Jim MacSween is the Chief of York Regional Police and is responsible for 2,300 employees, an operating and capital budget of \$390 million and community safety for 1.2 million citizens. He brings a balance of operational, administrative and strategic experience to his current role.

He is a recipient of the Governor General's Exemplary Service 20-year medal and completed his 30th year of policing in October of 2019.

Active in the community, Chief MacSween has volunteered his time with such organizations as Habitat for Humanity and Special Olympics Ontario, including serving on the games organizing committee for the 2013 Special Olympics Summer Games held in York Region. He is currently on the Board of Directors for St. Johns Ambulance and has previously served as Chair of the Community Services Committee. He is also an annual participant in the Law Enforcement Torch Run.



Dr. Stephen Hwang, Director, MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions, and St. Michael's Hospital Chair for Homelessness, Housing and Health



Dr. Hwang co-led the At Home/Chez Soi study, the largest randomized controlled trial in history to evaluate solutions to address homelessness. Its success testing the “Housing First” approach persuaded the federal government to commit resources to scale up Housing First interventions across the country.

Dr. Hwang is the director of MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions. He is also the St. Michael's Hospital Chair in Homelessness, Housing and Health, a scientist with the Li Ka Shing Knowledge Institute, and a professor in the University of Toronto's Department of Medicine, Dalla Lana School of Public Health and Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation. An internal-medicine physician at St. Michael's Hospital, Dr. Hwang conducts a weekly clinic at Seaton House, Canada's largest homeless shelter for men. Dr. Hwang's awards include the 2022 Alumni Award of Merit from the Harvard Chan School of Public Health, and the 2020 University of Toronto President's Impact Award.

Heather McDonald, CEO, LOFT

Heather McDonald is the CEO of LOFT, first appointed in 2017. LOFT is an important community partner and service provider in York Region, providing housing and outreach services for people struggling with mental and physical health issues in the Toronto and York/South Simcoe region. Heather has led comprehensive health clinic sites for people who face barriers to getting health services in the community in London and Toronto. Heather has previous work experience in areas of addiction, primary care, and the mediation fields.



Heather is a regular presenter at local, provincial and national conferences. She was awarded the Globe and Mail's Changemaker award in 2022.

Clovis Grant, CEO, 360°kids



Clovis Grant is the CEO of 360°kids, an organization that partners with York Region communities and organizations to develop opportunities for youth who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. 360°kids serve youth who are vulnerable or in crisis, through a variety of programs which provide stability and safety, increases their support system, and teaches them greater self-sufficiency.

Clovis has provided leadership in the Human Services sector for over 25 years in the areas of homelessness, employment, social assistance, mental health and disabilities. He has worked with HOPE *worldwide* Canada, The Region of York, and Eva's Initiatives.

Michael Braithwaite, CEO, Blue Door

Michael is the CEO of Blue Door and has over 30 years of experience creating innovative solutions to better support vulnerable people. As CEO, he has helped launch Blue Door's first employment social enterprise called Construct, three supportive housing programs including the first safe space for 2SLGBTQ+ youth in York Region, a national housing and homelessness podcast, a merger with Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold, and is currently executing a Solutions Lab in collaboration with SHS Consulting and Habitat for Humanity to explore the journey from homelessness to homeownership.



Previously Michael worked at Raising the Roof and 360°kids in York Region. As CEO of Raising the Roof, Michael launched Reside, a program to transform underutilized properties into affordable housing by engaging the social enterprise Building Up. As Executive Director at 360°kids, Michael led the development of several innovative and collaborative initiatives including the development of the Youth Hub, an Anti-Human Trafficking Program, the first Nightstop Housing Program in Canada, and in partnership with the York Region District School Board developed iGrad a classroom-based program whereby a teacher uses an e-learning platform to help youth complete high school.