



---

**Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services  
2024 York Region Health and Well-Being Review**

---

## **1. Recommendation**

1. Regional Chair write a letter to Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing formally requesting funding increases and policy adjustments to alleviate income insecurity in York Region, including:
  - a) Implement living wage and basic income policies.
  - b) Increase and index Ontario Works rates with inflation to meet life's basic needs.
  - c) Include the reduction of food insecurity as a component of all appropriate government policies.
  - d) Provide permanent long-term and predictable benefit programs like the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit beyond 2029 along with multi-year and sustained funding to expand access to affordable housing of all types.
2. Council include information about socio-economic, health and well-being trends and service pressures when meeting with provincial ministries and elected officials to raise awareness of the need.
3. Council direct staff to work with Human Services Planning Board, other community partners and municipal counterparts to identify innovative and collaborative solutions and advocate to senior levels of government for poverty reduction and housing stabilization initiatives and funding.
4. Regional Clerk circulate this report and Attachment 1 to the Clerks of the local municipalities, City of Toronto, Region of Peel, Durham Region, Ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Children, Community and Social Services, York Region Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Parliament, Ontario Municipal Social

## 2. Purpose

This report presents findings of the 2024 York Region Health and Well-Being Review (Attachment 1) and proposes recommendations to raise awareness and advocate for the needs of York Region residents. It focuses on addressing challenges posed by a growing, aging and diversifying population, decreasing income security, affordability pressures and mental health and well-being issues.

### Key Points:

- The Region is responsible for delivering a range of provincially mandated human services to residents. Expertise in local community needs and partnerships enable the Region to implement a person-centered approach to deliver human services
- Demand for programs and services delivered by the Region and community partners is increasing, due to population growth, shifting demographics, decreasing income security and mental health and well-being challenges
- Income insecurity contributes to greater reliance on Ontario Works, food programs and housing subsidies. As demand rises, provincial funding has not kept pace with inflation or service pressures, potentially impacting the Region's current and future service delivery levels
- Partnerships are crucial to successfully plan and deliver human services and to respond to evolving community needs. They are essential for joint advocacy and a unified voice to communicate calls to action, along with engaging with senior levels of government for support to deliver human services
- Investments by Regional Council have led to concrete actions in communities, enhanced strategic partnerships and integrated services to help residents in need

## 3. Background

Key trends from the 2024 York Region Health and Well-Being Review include a growing and diversifying population, decreasing income security, and challenges with affordability, mental health and well-being. These trends drive demand for human services and need for wraparound supports. These conditions are influenced by social determinants of health, which include economic, social, cultural and political factors beyond an individual's control. These determinants affect the overall health and well-being of residents. Additionally, intersecting aspects of identity, such as race, gender, economic status and sexual orientation amplify the impact of these factors on marginalized communities.

## 4. Analysis

### **Community and Health Services Department contributes to addressing socio-economic factors impacting the health and well-being of York Region residents**

The Community and Health Services (CHS) department ensures programs and services are accessible, responsive and aligned with evolving needs to build healthier, more engaged and inclusive communities for all residents. CHS supports Council's [Vision](#) of strong, caring and safe communities and the priority to support community well-being in the [2023 to 2027 Strategic Plan: From Vision to Results](#). It plans, delivers and oversees nine program areas, including six Regional core services and three support services. These services support residents, often during their most vulnerable times, and contribute to strengthening communities and the quality of life in York Region.

Regional Council, through CHS, has taken key actions and made investments to address evolving needs of residents. For example, in 2023, Council approved over \$12 million in [Critical Social Infrastructure investments](#) to address challenges in homelessness, housing and community investments. An [Implementation Update to Council on February 13, 2025](#) highlighted results of Regional Council's investments made in 2023 and 2024.

### **York Region's population is growing, aging and diversifying**

According to the 2021 Census, approximately 16% (200,000) of residents were seniors aged 65 and over. By 2051, seniors are expected to make up approximately 24% (over 499,000) of the population. While many seniors remain healthy, active and connected to their communities, some require additional supports and age-friendly services.

In 2021, York Region was home to an estimated 557,000 immigrants, making up 47.8% of the total population. Immigrants include anyone who has ever been a landed immigrant or permanent resident in Canada, while newcomers have been in Canada for less than five years. Temporary residents include work and/or study permit holders and asylum claimants. Migration drives population growth, with over 66,000 newcomers moving to York Region from 2019 to 2024, representing 71% of population growth. During this period, York Region welcomed over 32,000 temporary residents, including international students and foreign workers, the highest number recorded.

Newcomers enrich cultural diversity and bring talent and skills to support the economy. However, it takes time to acclimate. University-educated newcomers need at least five years to bridge the income gap with their Canadian-born counterparts, placing them at risk of economic precarity, associated income insecurity and impacts to mental health.

### **Decreasing income security impacts residents' ability to afford basic needs**

Income security refers to the level of income that ensures basic consumption needs can be met and influences overall well-being. Since 2021, average total income in York Region has

decreased, with more York Region residents experiencing low-income. In 2022, 18.6% (228,250) of residents lived below the low-income threshold, up from 16.8% (198,880) in 2019.

Job precarity is rising in York Region, with contract-based, seasonal, and temporary employment growing by 97% over the past decade, from 38,520 jobs in 2014 to 75,770 in 2024. Full-time employment opportunities, as a proportion of overall jobs in York Region, have declined since 2014. York Region residents have the highest debt to disposable income ratio in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, with the average York Region household owing \$3.13 for every dollar of disposable income in 2023.

Limited income contributes to inadequate or uncertain access to food. In 2023, an estimated 19.4% of York Region households experienced food insecurity up from 15.5% between 2021 and 2022. Food insecurity is driven by lack of income, not a lack of food. While food banks provide short-term relief, they are not a sustainable solution. Long-term improvements in financial conditions are essential to address the root causes of food insecurity and ensure all residents have reliable access to nutritious food.

### **A housing system with a range of options is needed to keep residents housed**

In 2021, over a quarter of homeowners (26.9% or 86,449) and just under half of renters (46.7% or 32,485) in York Region spent 30% or more of their income on shelter costs, the highest rates in Ontario. High rents and low vacancy rates make it difficult to find and keep housing, increasing the risk of homelessness.

York Region has not met its affordability targets for six consecutive years. In 2023, 85% (7,469) of new housing units were ownership units, and 15% (1,271) were rental. No affordable ownership units were built, but all new rental units (1,271) were classified as affordable. Homelessness is increasing in York Region, with 986 people experiencing homelessness for longer than six months in 2024, up from 124 in 2019. Encampment locations increased from 61 in 2021 to 361 known locations in 2024.

### **Mental health and well-being challenges are growing**

Mental health and well-being challenges negatively impact residents' ability to work productively, manage daily stresses, and positively contribute to their community. In 2023, York Regional Police responded to over 6,200 mental health related calls, a 27% increase since 2020. During the same period, York Region Paramedic Services reported a 29% increase in suspected opioid overdose calls, from 5,645 in 2020 to 6,097 in 2023. As of February 24, 2025, opioid-related deaths increased by 38%, with 83 opioid-related deaths in 2023, compared to 60 in 2022.

## **These socio-demographic trends are increasing reliance on human services provided by CHS and community partners**

Income insecurity impacts core human services provided by the Region. In December 2024, 21,648 people in York Region were supported by Ontario Works, an 84% increase from December 2018 of 11,746.

Demand for subsidized housing is outpacing the Region's capacity. In 2024, about 4,500 new applications were added to the wait list, while 436 households were housed. Emergency and transitional housing facilities regularly operate at or near capacity. The average length of stay in emergency housing almost doubled from 2019 to 2024 increasing from 26.5 to 51.7 days.

Mental-health and well-being challenges increase case complexity and the need for wraparound supports. Some residents experience difficulty navigating the mental health system and feel ill-equipped to manage their mental health needs or those of dependents. Service backlogs, stigma, and limited availability of culturally tailored care can increase struggles. The Community Paramedicine Outreach Response Team expanded hours of service to support people living unsheltered, in encampments or experiencing chronic homelessness, supporting 505 individuals in 2023.

## **Sustained funding and creative collaborations are crucial to help prevent challenges from becoming more acute and widespread**

CHS service delivery levels are evolving to meet growing demand and rising costs. While community partners in York Region are stepping up to address capacity challenges, they are also facing significant pressures as service demand continues to grow. Together, we are working to meet service needs effectively.

To mitigate budget pressures while enhancing service delivery, CHS is exploring new collaborations and innovative solutions to support residents. For example, Housing Services launched a new Community Housing Supply Grant Pilot Program in 2023 to support non-profits building new community housing.

Between 2022 and 2024, 47,872 individuals were engaged through upstream activities of the [Community Safety and Well-Being Plan for York Region](#), which focuses on strengthening community capacity to address local safety and well-being challenges in priority areas of housing, economic stability and mental well-being. This includes the Community Action Tables, Children, Youth and Family Situation Tables, Service Navigator Pilot Program, Mobile Youth Services Hub and Community Violence Prevention Funding that supports projects led and delivered by residents to address community safety priorities.

The Region's [Community Investment Fund](#) invests in initiatives that target gaps in delivery of human services, complement or enhance Regional programs and deliver on policy priorities set by Regional Council. For 2023-2027 term of Council, priority investment areas include housing stability, mental well-being, diversity, equity, and inclusion and food security system development.

Additionally, the Region leverages expertise of the Human Services Planning Board to identify innovative solutions to enhance and integrate services for residents including through implementation of the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan.

By working closely with partners and maintaining a strong focus on advocacy, CHS is committed to addressing these challenges and continuing to support the community effectively and collaboratively. This includes alignment with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario’s (AMO’s) [2025 Pre-Budget Submission](#), Ontario Municipal Social Services Association’s (OMSSA’s) [Policy Priorities and Positions](#), United Way Greater Toronto’s (UWGT’s) 2025 [Ontario Pre-Budget Submission](#) and advocacy to the provincial government for:

- prioritizing implementation of living wage and basic income policies
- higher Ontario Works benefit rates for clients, such as to increase and index Ontario Works rates with inflation to meet life’s basic needs including the reduction of food insecurity as an outcome of all appropriate government policies
- increasing the availability of supportive, transitional and deeply affordable housing. This includes providing permanent long-term and predictable benefit programs such as the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit, along with multi-year and sustained funding to expand access to affordable housing of all types

The 2024 York Region Health and Well-Being Review underscores the Region’s efforts and vital role for CHS in fostering a thriving, healthy and welcoming community for all residents in every stage of life. However, the Region alone cannot sustain the investment needed to address income insecurity and case complexity. Ensuring residents' health and well-being is a shared responsibility that demands support from all levels of government.

## 5. Financial Considerations

The CHS Operating Budget has grown by \$633 million (102%) since 2020, as detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**CHS Gross and Net Operating Budgets (2020 to 2025)**

Operating Budget \$ millions:	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Gross Expenditures	658.4	749.0	877.5	1,058.4	1,066.5	1254.4
Funded By						
Reserves, Development Charges, 3 <sup>rd</sup> Party and Fees	32.3	30.1	33.2	42.9	43.7	44.0

<b>Operating Budget \$ millions:</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
Grants and Subsidies	401.1	470.3	587.8	747.0	740.3	909.6
Net Tax Levy	225.0	248.5	256.5	268.5	282.5	300.7
<b>% Net Tax Levy</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24%</b>

CHS relies on funding from other levels of government to deliver programs and services to residents, with the majority of its operating budget (73%) coming from grants and subsidies from senior levels of government in 2025. Senior government funding has grown by \$532 million since 2020, an increase of 141%. This is predominantly driven by the introduction of the 100% provincially/federally funded Canada Wide Early Learning Child Care program, which accounts for 76% of the total increase, with a further 13% relating to 100% provincially funded Ontario Works benefits, driven by increases in Ontario Works cases.

Tax levy investments in CHS have grown by \$87 million since 2020, an increase of 41%. Tax levy funding helps support program delivery costs. Staff have been reviewing funding trends for these mandated programs and this analysis will be brought forward in a report to Council in April 2025.

This report does not present current or anticipated financial changes to the Region’s budget or fiscal position. While there are no immediate financial considerations associated with the recommendations of this report, this report affirms the importance of provincial funding to supporting program and service pressures.

## **6. Local Impact**

York Region delivers critical human and health service programs to support residents in all nine local municipalities. The 2024 York Region Health and Well-Being Review is intended to support Regional Council and local municipalities to build awareness of resident needs, and jointly advocate for funding and policy decisions to ensure programs and services can continue to support all residents.

## **7. Conclusion**

Partnerships form a foundation for joint advocacy, providing a unified voice to promote key messages and calls to action and engaging senior levels of government. Council’s investments have led to concrete community actions, strengthened partnerships and supported residents in need. Collaborating across governments and with community partners is essential for advocating for funding and identifying new partnerships and innovative solutions to enhance services for residents.

---

For more information on this report, please contact Mary Boushel, Director, Strategies and Partnerships Branch, at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 78389. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Recommended by:

**Lisa Gonsalves**  
Commissioner of Community and Health Services



Approved for Submission:

**Erin Mahoney**  
Chief Administrative Officer

February 24, 2025  
16554216

Attachment 1 – 2024 York Region Health and Well-Being Review York #16622034