

# Local mental health and addiction services groups receive \$3 million provincial boost

**By Brock Weir**

Addiction Services for York

Region set out this past winter to make inroads into many of our community's hotspots, working with youth and adults dealing with substance use challenges without the means to seek help with the launch of their mobile unit.

Now, thanks to a significant cash infusion by the Provincial Government, the Aurora-based organization is preparing to double down in making a difference.

Addiction Services for York

Region (ASYR) was one of eight local organizations to benefit from \$2.97 million in Provincial Funding announced by Health Minister ? and Newmarket-Aurora MPP ? Christine Elliott on Wednesday at the Canadian Mental Health Association ? York Region & South Simcoe's Aurora headquarters.

Ms. Elliott was joined by

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, York Simcoe MPP Caroline Mulrone, King MPP Stephen Lecce and a host of other dignitaries at the announcement, which will see ASYR receive \$1.315 million of the allocation.

In addition, Kinark Child and

Family Services will receive \$1.05 million, Lance Krasman Memorial Centre for Community Mental Health \$160,700, York Support Services Network \$150,000, Family Services of York Region \$148,752, CMHA York Region \$123,915, and Bethany Lodge \$22,000.

In a statement, the Province

said Ontario's mental health care system is ?disconnected, making it difficult for patients and families to get the care and services they need,? leaving many vulnerable Ontarians having to navigate a ?confusing? system on their own and access timely mental health care only when in crisis.

?Our government is keeping

our promise to make mental health and addictions a priority,? said Ms. Elliott. ?This additional funding will go directly towards services for patients and families and reduce wait times, enhance opioids and addictions services, create additional housing and build capacity in youth mental health right here in our community.

?These investments are part

of our government's commitment to invest \$3.8 billion over the next 10 years to develop and implement a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions strategy. Together, we will create a connected system of care with comprehensive wrap-around services to ensure that every Ontarian is fully

supported in their journey towards mental wellness.?

Added Mr. Parsa: ?This announcement is a clear indication of our government's commitment to protecting what matters most by ensuring that the residents of York Region, and Ontario, have the supports they need, when they need them.?

Ensuring the residents of York Region, South Simcoe and beyond had the supports they need when they needed them was a driving force behind the launch of ASYR's Rapid Access Addiction Medicine Clinics, or RAAMs.

With their significant funding infusion, Penny Marrett, Executive Director of ASYR, says youth will be a primary demographic to benefit.

?Our focus is providing supports and treatments for people living with addictions, and their loved ones,? says Ms. Marrett. ?We are going to be looking at supporting youth in a more targeted way in some areas, and we're going to be supporting their loved ones also. We're going to expand some of the services we currently offer and expanding the RAAM clinics we run. We currently run five of them and next month we will be starting our sixth one. [This funding] will enable us to expand them for individuals who are experiencing some substance use disorder, whether it is opioid, alcohol or another substance. They can walk into one of these clinics without an appointment, low barrier, talk to one of our nurses, who will connect them with an addictions medicine specialist.

?With the addictions medicine specialists will determine whether some sort of pharmacal therapy would assist them with their substance use disorder. That is a very exciting for us to be able to expand that piece. Part of this will enable us to go into more under-served communities. This funding will enable us to look at how we can actually continue that because if you don't have your own transportation, it is challenging at times for public transit to be able to make it to our clinics because our clinics are not open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.?

Clinics are currently located in hospitals throughout York Region, including Southlake Regional Health Centre and Stevenson Memorial. ASYR's goal is to move it out further into the community to enable people to get services outside of the hospital.

Their vision is to continue collaborative work with their partners as it related to the Provincial Opioid Strategy to see how they can come up with additional publicly-funded residential treatment beds, all of which in York Region are, at the moment, privately-funded.

?You have to pay and it is not cheap,? says Ms. Marrett. ?We want to be able provide some of our partners

who provide residential treatment with some funding so that individuals who really are in need who might not be able to afford it can participate and can actually begin to address some of the concerns they have related to their substance use.?