

## Region needs more funding from Province to deliver key programs: York

Some of the services York Region residents rely on the most are facing significant challenges due to a shortfall in Provincial funding, according to the Region of York.

According to a report adopted by Regional Council, there is a \$77 million funding shortfall from the Province for programs related to homelessness, long-term care, paramedic emergency services, and public health programs which are mandated to the Region by the Ontario Government.

York Region is responsible for delivering essential programs and services to our communities that contribute to resident and community health and well-being, but we cannot do it alone, said York Region Chair Eric Jolliffe in a statement. York Region and the Province must continue working together to identify sustainable funding agreements that ensure these vital services remain available and are responsive to support our growing and diverse community needs. Of the four key programs, there is a \$24.5 million shortfall for homelessness community programs; a \$27.1 million shortfall for long-term care as the Region operates two homes where residents receive 24-hour nursing and personal care; a \$4.6 million shortfall in funding paramedic services; and a shortfall of \$20.7 million to York Region Public Health.

The Region says that while there have been funding increases from upper levels of governments in some areas, support has not kept pace with inflation, nor with the increased complexity of client needs.

\$219 million of tax levy is estimated to have been used between 2022 and 2025 to address the gaps.

While we appreciate funding we have received from senior levels of government, sustainable funding is needed to permanently ensure services delivered by municipalities, on behalf of the province, don't put extra costs on municipal budgets, said City of Vaughan Regional Councillor Gino Rosati, Chair of Community and Health Services. By working together, York Region and the Province can overcome this challenge and ensure the high-quality human and health services programs residents rely on every day remain effective and available to everyone.

The Region's report, Provincial Funding Shortfall of Human and Health-Related Programs and Services, notes the Region is expected to see a population of more than two million people by 2051, and new funding models will need to be examined.

While York Region continues to act swiftly to address the growing number of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, including people living in encampments, annual provincial funding is not keeping pace, reads the report. Funding did not increase in 2024 and based on preliminary planning allocations provided, funding will not increase in 2025. The 2025 budget for Homelessness Community Programs assumes a \$24.5M shortfall in provincial funding.

York Region continues to explore funding options to help increase homelessness supports and services, such as accessing one-time Federal Reaching Home funding through the United Way Greater Toronto of just over \$0.5M in both 2023 and 2024. As reported to Council in January 2025, York Region successfully secured \$10.8M under new two-year Federal Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Initiative funding stream and \$1.4M for 2024/2025 in Provincial Encampment Response Initiative funding. However, the federal funding includes a cost-matching requirement that does not provide any tax levy relief, and the provincial funding can only be applied to expenditures incurred between January 1 to March 31, 2025. The onetime nature of these funding sources may provide temporary assistance, but do not offer a sustainable ongoing alternative funding source to tax levy.

Most mandated programs delivered by Public Health are funded by the Province using a formula requiring local Boards of Health, such as municipalities, to share in the total cost of program delivery. As such, York Region is required to pay for 25% of eligible expenses with a provincial cost-share contribution of 75%. However, the province has placed a limit on their portion of the funding.

Since 2018, provincial funding has increased by an average of less than 1% or \$0.2M per year for Public Health mandated

programs with expenses increasing at an annual average of 4.3% or \$3.2M, creating a tax levy pressure to maintain service levels. In principle, the Province funds 75% of eligible expenses in the arrangement, but in 2024 only 54% were covered by the \$46.2M provincial funding received. This means York Region provided tax levy for the 25% mandated cost share and an additional \$23.3M tax levy to fund the true cost to deliver services.?

Compounding challenges for the Public Health file include increases in reportable infectious diseases and case counts for such ailments as influenza, chicken pox, and infectious syphilis, and ?unpredictable disease surges,? a significant rise in the number of establishments that need public health inspections, and ?change in substance use patterns, including three times more opioid -related deaths, higher rates of youth vaping, and an increase in cannabis-related emergency department visits.?

?The provincial government has recognized the need to adjust funding formulas in some areas; however, there is still an issue with total funding to York Region for mandated services,? the report continues. ?Economic and social changes in the community need a strong health and human services sector. Regular, proactive discussions with provincial ministries will help ensure funding takes into account population growth, socio-demographic shifts and increased costs to deliver services.

?There is an opportunity to improve provincial systems and services that create efficiencies for York Region. For example, provincial technological delays have required York Region, along with other municipalities, to develop stand-alone data infrastructures for infectious diseases. An integrated provincial system would mitigate costs and increase efficiencies.?

**By Brock Weir**