

Regional Mental Health Centre gets Provincial boost as it eyes 2027 opening



York Region's Mental Health and Community Care Centre is eyeing an opening in 'early 2027' following a fresh infusion of cash from the Provincial Government.

The project, which will be led by the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region and South Simcoe (CMHA-YRSS) in Newmarket, received a significant boost in support from the Ontario Ministry of Health on Thursday afternoon when Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy presented the project with a one-time grant of \$1,095,100.

The grant is intended to help the CMHA-YRSS in start-up costs as work continues to transform a disused commercial building on Yonge Street into a place where all can come to receive immediate mental health care interventions and referrals.

'Mental health is deeply personal to so many of us, whether it's a family member, a friend, a neighbour, even ourselves,' said MPP Gallagher Murphy. 'Today, I am truly proud to be able to stand before you and announce that our government is investing \$1,095,100 in one-time funding for the [year] 24-25 to support the first year of facility and start-up costs for the new York Region Mental Health and Community Care Centre.'

'This new 24-7 community-based facility will offer critical support to individuals in mental health crises. Once open, the hub will provide up to 10 crises and stabilization beds. The Centre will be the first of its kind in York Region, providing care for individuals age 12 and up. Through its integrated approach and strong partnerships, it will guide people to the next step in their recovery and away from emergency rooms that are already stretched thin.'

Gallagher Murphy assured the CMHA-YRSS that the June 26 announcement was 'one of many to come' and acknowledged the organization's 'passion, leadership and care' within the communities it serves.

This appreciation was reciprocated by Rebecca Shields, CEO of the CMHA-YRSS.

Shields said she was grateful for Gallagher Murphy's 'tireless advocacy' both on the mental health file and in making this Centre a reality 'and she noted the ongoing work behind the scenes to make it a reality as well.'

'We are making progress,' said Shields, standing in front of the stripped-back building which was most recently a Mission Thrift Store which moved to a space across the street two years ago. 'Over the past year, we've done a lot of site preparation work, a lot of the capital planning work, we've been inside removing the mold, fixing up the roof, and we've been doing all the excavations. We've been doing all the site permitting, we've been doing all the soil testing and getting read. With the support of the Town of Newmarket, we got our zoning bylaw amendment, so we are ready to go as we cost out in this next stage.'

“We’re happy to be on site as we prepare over the next year to get those shovels in the ground, but really to get the renovation going. On the planning side, we have six committees up and running. These committees range from our first responders like our police and paramedics on how we bring people into the Centre. We’ve been able to submit documents and attestations around having this centre as an alternate destination, and we’re really excited about that because this is what it’s all about: ensuring that people get the right immediate access to specialised care when they need it most.

“We’ve also been working with our partners to look at all of our equity-deserving or equity denied-groups, all the way from youth, individuals from the Black community, from different ethno-cultural communities, our Indigenous partners, to ensure that this is a culturally safe and welcoming place for those when they come. A lot of planning work around health equity. We’ve also been engaging in a tremendous amount of work as to what’s going to happen after. Working with all of our other mental health and social care partners from Addiction Services of York Region, all the way from our shelters and our other community providers, primary care, on how do we make those referrals and transitions? Because if you’re going to make sure somebody’s first mental health crisis is their last, you have to make sure that they’re connected to the right supports that they need.”

To bring the facility fully into fruition, Shields noted the CMHA-YRSS’ Lead the Way capital campaign is ongoing, allowing residents at large “to make the difference and make the experience in this hub what it’s really meant to be, which is somewhere where people feel welcome [and] this is where they want to come when they need help.”

“Whether your age is 12 and up, and you’re coming because you have anxiety or you’re coming because you’re having trouble with substance abuse or alcohol, this is a place where you’re going to get the care and the supports we need,” Shields concluded. “Thank you again to the Government of Ontario for ensuring that we can continue to do this work and get ready to open the doors, hopefully early in 2027.”

If you are interested in contributing to the Lead the Way campaign, visit www.thecentre-yr.ca.

By Brock Weir