



KATHERINE CHISLETT, Commissioner
Community and Health Services Department

July 19, 2019

Ontario's Seniors Strategy Consultation
Seniors Policy and Programs Division
Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility
777 Bay Street, Suite 601C
Toronto, ON M7A 2J4

Dear Minister Cho,

Re: York Region Response - Ontario's Seniors Strategy Consultation

York Region thanks the Province for consulting with stakeholders on a government-wide Ontario's Seniors Strategy. This response is provided by York Region staff. Due to the short review timeframe provided, it was not possible to bring this response to York Region Council for endorsement. Staff will bring this submission forward to Regional Council for endorsement this fall. Should Council have additional comments, staff will forward them along with the endorsement.

York Region Council approved its Seniors Strategy in 2016, and the Ontario Government is encouraged to consider our Strategy in its deliberations on Ontario's Seniors Strategy

[York Region Seniors Strategy: Thinking Ahead](#) aims at preparing for an increasing and aging population while continuing to attract jobs and grow our economy.

York Region is one of many service providers within the complex system of programs that serve seniors. Therefore, the Strategy was informed by discussions with subject matter experts, seniors and seniors-serving organizations, and these 140 consultations provided a better understanding of seniors' needs and identified possible solutions. Internal and external expertise is critical to developing solutions to meet the needs of an aging population, and all levels of government have a role to play together with community organizations.

The Region's Strategy focuses on four priority areas which guide collaborative efforts across the corporation to support seniors:

1. Broad Policy and Finance: Balancing the needs of seniors with all residents
2. Health: Keeping seniors healthier, longer
3. Aging in Place: Supporting age-friendly, complete communities
4. Staying Safe and Connected: Connect seniors and caregivers to the right programs and services at the right time

Regional Council recommends the Ontario Government add more long-term care beds in York Region

York Region's senior's population is growing faster than any other age group. By 2031, one in five (339,620) York Region residents will be aged 65 or older. New long-term care beds will ease pressures on emergency health services so they can be ready for an aging population with complex needs. To meet the increasing needs, more long-term care beds are also required to maintain service levels. Regional Council has set as a priority to advocate to improve policy planning and decision making for long-term care beds by developing a forecast for York Region, including required number, type and location, as identified in [York Region 2019-2023 Strategic Plan: From Vision to Results](#).

Regional Council recommends the Ontario Government improve system navigation to ensure seniors are connected to the right services at the right times

Seniors and their caregivers need to know what supports are available, where and how to access information, and who to ask for help; reducing potentially avoidable, non-emergency calls to 911. To help seniors better access services, York Region has:

- Entered into an agreement with Findhelp Information Services, one of the regional service providers for 211 in Ontario, to collect and maintain Regional human services data. This will provide seniors and caregivers access to complete and relevant information about human services
- Analyzed data to understand seniors in York Region their characteristics and vulnerabilities. The Region is currently researching the primary programs and services required by seniors to age in place. These actions help to better respond to the needs of seniors and inform service planning. Both initiatives were funded through the Provincial Seniors Community Grant.

To help seniors and caregivers navigate the complex system of service, York Region recommends that the Ontario Government:

- Partner with municipalities and community organizations to access local data on available human services
- Consider self-serve options and a single point of access.

Long term planning and investment in prevention initiatives are needed to reduce and manage health-related demands of an aging population

Seniors need preventative programs and information to help them make healthy choices that offset risks associated with aging. Seniors have told us they want to age in place; that is to live in their home or community of choice for as long as possible. For seniors to age in place, they need to stay as healthy as possible.

To decrease demand on emergency health services, York Region recommends that the Ontario Government:

- Invite municipalities to planning tables so local knowledge of programs and services and senior's needs are reflected; similar to the Ontario Health Team approach
- Increase funding for preventative programs that improve and maintain seniors health, including Public Health Fall Prevention Services, Community Paramedicine and Nature's Classroom, which is an informative outdoor education program that promotes physical activity, social connectedness and healthy eating
- Continue to fund appropriate home and community care supports that are available across the Province, including homecare, adult day programs and respite care
- Educate seniors on how to take care of themselves to prevent and divert non-emergency 911 calls.

In age-friendly, complete communities, seniors require innovative housing options, better ways of getting around and easily accessible support services

Community design can affect physical and mental well-being and choices seniors make to live independently, access services and facilities, and find alternative housing, mobility and employment regardless of age. Through sustainable planning, aging individuals are able to remain in their existing community close to family, social networks, familiar services and facilities. York Region's activities to create age-friendly complete communities include:

- Development of a Complete Communities discussion paper on [Built Form Adaptations](#) to create more seniors friendly housing, as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review process to update the Regional Official Plan, including feedback from seniors on what components are most important now and in the future
- Development of the Unionville Seniors Hub to build affordable housing and co-locate a range of services for the health and well-being of seniors living in the community. York Region contributed the capital funding to build the Hub and is now working with community partners, service providers and funders to develop a financially sustainable operating model for the services to be provided at and from that location
- Expansion of transportation options for registered users of Mobility Plus and the York Region Transit/Viva service for those traveling to day programs and medical appointments.

Creating a diverse mix and range of housing options that are affordable and accessible is a major contributor to quality of life, well-being and community health. Demand for affordable housing among seniors in York Region continues to increase. At the end of 2018 there were more than 8,660 seniors waiting for a subsidized unit. Seniors who received a subsidy in 2018 waited just over 7 years on average. While the Region recognizes and appreciates funding allocated under the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative, the amount is not sufficient to address growing need in our communities given the very high cost of housing and limited availability of rental supply. To help create age friendly complete communities, York Region recommends that the Ontario Government:

- Increase infrastructure funding for housing services and plan for a variety of housing options, particularly rental, affordable retirement homes, secondary suites and congregate living. The Housing Supply Action Plan helps with this but greater efforts are necessary to create rental housing for all household sizes, including seniors
- Provide municipalities with their share of the Provincial Non-Residence Speculation Tax as this would go a long way to assist municipalities by dedicating that revenue to create affordable housing.

Lack of access to transportation is a main contributor to social isolation commonly defined as a low quantity and quality of contact with others, has implications for mental and physical health, safety and well-being. To ensure seniors have greater access to all modes of transportation, York Region recommends that the Ontario Government:

- Focus on providing accessible and convenient transportation for mobility. The Province along with municipalities must be innovative to develop transportation

options that are accessible, convenient and connect communities to encourage walkability in a way that is safe for seniors.

Seniors need better access to integrated services to successfully age in place. York Region is unable to do this work alone and recommends that the Ontario Government:

- Work with municipalities, community agencies, the private sector and Ontario Health Teams to design and implement multi-service hub models
- Provide sustainable funding to operate multi-service hubs, like the Unionville Seniors Hub
- Allocate sustainable funding to community paramedic services as the program helps seniors live safely at home longer. As the new Ontario Health Team model is being developed, local hospitals have emphasized the need to partner with community paramedicine as the program is key to ending hallway medicine by providing timely care to York Region residents in the community. However, because the program is almost exclusively funded through municipal tax levy, the current funding model is not sustainable.

The Ontario Seniors Strategy has an opportunity to have/be a needs based approach

York Region strives for fairness of people in all age groups by using assets and income thresholds rather than age for eligibility to target subsidies to those that need it the most. York Region developed programs and services to prioritize low-income seniors. Some of these initiatives include:

- Changing eligibility criteria for subsidized housing by introducing income and asset limits
- Developing an Ability to Pay Policy to target limited resources to those that need it most regardless of age

To ensure the best outcomes, York Region recommends that the Ontario government:

- Target subsidies based on need, no matter the age of the resident. A needs-based approach captures low-income seniors, as well as residents across all age groups who are financially vulnerable.

Collaboration and co-design is fundamental to finding the right solutions to support seniors

Programs and services for seniors are delivered across governments, agencies and community organizations that have historically worked separately. Successful implementation of the Ontario Seniors Strategy requires alignment, collaboration and

partnership with municipal initiatives to effectively serve and support seniors. Municipalities are valuable partners to support the planning, policy and decision making for seniors.

York Region recommends that the Ontario Government:

- Lead and develop innovative service delivery solutions
- Engage and consult with municipalities, long-term care homes and other senior's organizations to most effectively meet the needs of our senior's population.

With a Strategy in place since 2016, York Region is striving to meet the needs of a growing and aging population. We can't do this alone. Regional staff is committed to working collaboratively with industry, Provincial, agency and other partners to provide better care and support to ensure seniors are healthier, connected to their communities and able to age in place.

For questions regarding these comments and the linked Strategy, please contact Katherine Chislett at Katherine.Chislett@york.ca) or Lisa Gonsalves at Lisa.Gonsalves@york.ca.

Sincerely



Katherine Chislett
Commissioner, Community and Health Services
The Regional Municipality of York