

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of Committee of the Whole

FROM: Adelina Urbanski, Commissioner of Community and Health Services

DATE: November 7, 2013

RE: **Minimum Wage and Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultations**

In September 2013, the Province initiated consultations in two areas that have the potential to impact regional services and programs. The first examined how the minimum wage is set and the second asked for feedback on the Province's *Poverty Reduction Strategy*. The Region undertook internal consultations on each to answer the questions asked by the Province. This communication provides an overview of our response.

Minimum Wage

In May 2013, the Ministry of Labour announced it was establishing an *Advisory Panel* to recommend how to adjust Ontario's minimum wage. The *Panel* is composed of an independent Chair and representatives from business, worker and youth groups. In August 2013, the *Advisory Panel* launched consultations seeking feedback on how to establish a process for determining the minimum wage, what indicators should be considered, frequency of review and mechanisms to notify employers and employees prior to implementing changes to the minimum wage. The *Panel* did not request feedback on what the minimum wage should be. Staff consulted internally on approaches for determining future adjustments to minimum wage and provided a Regional response to the *Advisory Panel (Attachment 1)*.

Minimum wage creates a wage floor for the labour market and helps ensure a minimum standard of living for employees. In Ontario, minimum wage increases have generally occurred on a discretionary basis rather than through an established process. The current system is ad hoc, lacks predictability for business and results in fluctuation of real dollars earned by low income workers. The minimum wage is currently \$10.25 per hour and was last raised in 2010.

The Region's submission to the *Advisory Panel* on minimum wage recommends that a new system for determining minimum wage should be established, one which is fair and transparent

for business, works together with social assistance benefits to encourage Ontarians to move off social assistance and to move low income earners above the poverty line. A successful minimum wage system should include an annual review by an independent advisory committee, composed of academics, low income earners, non-earners, large and small business and government representatives. The committee should review minimum wage based on factors such as economic conditions, cost of living, changes to the *Consumer Price Index*, vacancy rates and average cost of rent, the effect of minimum wage on non-earners and core housing needs; increases should be scheduled every two years.

The Region's response also highlighted regional differences in the cost of living across the Province and suggested other mechanisms that could be considered to ensure a minimum standard of living, such as, regionally based income supports, wage subsidies and refundable tax credits, to leave low income earners with more money to invest in their local economies.

Poverty Reduction Strategy

In 2008, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services launched *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*. The five year *Strategy* focused on reducing poverty for children and their families and providing supports to achieve their full potential.

In August 2013, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services announced the Province was renewing its commitment to reduce poverty with the launch of province-wide consultations to hear how government and communities can continue to work together to break the cycle of poverty. The consultations sought feedback on the outcomes of the first *Strategy* and input into the development of a new five-year *Poverty Reduction Strategy* for Ontario.

Staff consulted internally and prepared a coordinated response to the Ministry (*Attachment 2*). The Region's response recommends several approaches and critical elements to include in the next poverty reduction strategy:

- Access to child care, early intervention, recreation programs and other children's services.
- Sustained funding for social and affordable housing and adequate shelter allowances for social assistance recipients.
- Supports for low income workers and residents struggling to make ends meet who are new to or re-entering the labour market.
- Encourage local strategies that meet community needs, connect people to supports and services and enhance local networks.
- Access to affordable, timely health care.
- Support health benefits for early mental health identification and supports, investing in oral health funding for emergency care, dentures and healthy babies programs.
- Enhance existing partnerships and collaborations with municipal sector and municipal associations.

A long-term *Poverty Reduction Strategy* will need to draw upon municipal expertise to understand regional variations in poverty, learn from local strategies and integrate more client-centred approaches to providing services. Low income residents and workers and residents at

risk of falling into long-term poverty would benefit from a coordinated systems approach that provides stability, housing options, employment, family and health supports.

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) coordinated a municipal sector response to the Province. A response was sent by the Region to OMSSA to inform their submission.

Next Steps

Staff will monitor the progress of both the recommendations on the minimum wage and the development of the next *Poverty Reduction Strategy* and report back to Council as appropriate.

Adelina Urbanski,
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

AU/ml

Attachments - 2

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Bill Fisch, B.Com., LLB, J.D.
Chairman and CEO



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October 15, 2013

Mr. Anil Verma, Chair
Minimum Wage Advisory Panel
Ontario Ministry of Labour
400 University Ave., 12th Floor
Toronto, ON, M7A 1T7

Dear Mr. Verma:

Re: York Region's Submission for Ontario's Consultation on Minimum Wage

On behalf of The Regional Municipality of York, I am pleased to provide our comments to the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel (see *Attachment 1*).

York Region supports the panel's important task of reviewing approaches for determining future adjustments to the minimum wage in Ontario. Minimum wage creates a wage floor for the labour market and helps ensure a minimum standard of living for employees. In Ontario, minimum wage increases have generally occurred on a discretionary basis rather than through an established process. The current system is ad hoc, lacks predictability for business and results in fluctuation of real dollars earned by low income workers.

Any decision regarding how the minimum wage is determined will not only affect low-income employees and employers, but those that experience multiple barriers to finding sustainable work. Changes to minimum wage can impact municipal programs and services that work to support low-income residents whenever they struggle to make ends meet.

As such, it is important that the panel recognize that the minimum wage cannot be determined in isolation. With this in mind, it is our suggestion that an independent advisory committee be established to provide recommendations to the Provincial government on the minimum wage.

October 18, 2013

York Region's Submission for Ontario's Consultation on Minimum Wage

As a service system manager, municipal governments are directly impacted by changes that affect the low-income population. We appreciate the opportunity to respond, and look forward to the panel's final report and recommendations.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Fisch".

Bill Fisch
Chairman and CEO

Attachment

Copy to: The Honourable Yasir Naqvi, M.P.P., Minister of Labour

York Region's response to *A Consultation Paper on Ontario's Minimum Wage*

The Regional Municipality of York respectfully submits the following for your consideration as part of the consultation on Ontario's Minimum Wage.

Overall, York Region recommends a change from the current ad hoc system as it lacks predictability for business and results in fluctuation of real dollars earned by low-income workers. Minimum wage cannot be determined in isolation. As outlined in the consultation paper, it creates a wage floor for the labour market and helps ensure a minimum standard of living for employees. Any system for determining future rates must consider the incentive for Ontarians to move off social assistance and the potential to assist low-income earners to move above the poverty line. However, the rate must be fair and transparent for employers.

Ontario should consider the local impact of minimum wage

The Ontario government should consider the local impact of minimum wage. By considering factors such as housing vacancy rates, average cost of rent, suitability of housing and core housing need, Ontario may find that minimum wage provides a very different standard of living across the Province. While fluctuation in minimum wage across the Province may not be possible, additional income supports on a regional scale could help to balance the differences in cost of living and core housing need.

Minimum wage should work in tandem with Social Assistance Reform

Ontario should consider the interdependencies of minimum wage; its effect on low-income families, and those that experience multiple barriers to finding sustainable employment. Minimum wage should be high enough so that those who earn the minimum wage can make ends meet, but not create so large a gap that those who cannot work are left isolated and financially vulnerable.

The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario recommended social assistance rate restructuring that balances the objectives of adequacy, fairness to people who are working and not receiving social assistance and providing reasonable financial incentives for people receiving social assistance to increase their earnings. The Ontario minimum wage is an important part of this discussion as it could potentially set the level of income where social assistance benefits are phased out entirely as people increase their earnings. Creating a more systematic approach to setting and reviewing minimum wage levels that is grounded in regular assessments of economic and labour market conditions will help ensure that social assistance benefits and minimum wage work together. When the two work in tandem, people who are unlikely to sustain labour market attachment are provided a base level of adequate income, while those seeking employment are able to advance in the labour market.

The role of the minimum wage in addressing low income issues and how it intersects with social assistance reform should be acknowledged by the panel in their report to the Minister of Labour.

Minimum wage is not the only way to provide income security

Minimum wage is just one part of addressing the broader issues of low income and economic security. Minimum wage levels, although important to sustain the value of wages at the lower end of the wage spectrum, cannot alone address the overall income needs of families while balancing potential impacts on the labour market. In a complete Poverty Reduction Strategy, minimum wage is one factor for addressing low income needs, but must be considered within a range of other supports including employment supports, targeted wage subsidies and refundable tax credits.

The Consumer Price Index and Average Weekly Earnings should be considered as economic indicators

York Region recommends the Consumer Price Index be considered when reviewing the minimum wage however, as most goods are tied to this index, increasing minimum wage by the same only maintains the status quo. Average Weekly Earnings is more reflective of high-income earners; though it may help to consider this indicator to ensure increases are working to bridge the gap between high and low income Ontarians and not increase it further.

Further research is required to determine the demographics of Ontarians who rely on minimum wage and the impact on low income earners.

With the decrease in manufacturing and increase in service sector employment that Ontario has experienced, it is no longer largely youth who rely on minimum wage. According to the report, *Who is Working for Minimum Wage in Ontario* published by the Wellesley Institute, “an increasing share of the Ontario workforce is working at minimum wage. And in 2011, there [was] an even larger number of employees making between \$10.25 and \$14.25 an hour.... These employees are more likely to be prime age workers than youth” (Block, 2013, p. 8). Further, these employees are not equally distributed across the population as marginalized groups (i.e. women, youth and newcomers) are over-represented in the low wage job market. Given the changes to the economy in the last five years, the Panel should consider who is impacted by minimum wage increases; the percentage of those who are relying on minimum wage to support a family; what proportion of low-income earners are employed by large corporations; and how many Ontario households are relying on this wage floor to make ends meet?

According to the Wellesley Institute, “international research demonstrates that [income] inequality has an impact on our health and well-being. Increasing minimum wage has the potential to reduce income inequality and positively impact health and well-being for all workers, particularly those of low income.

York Region recommends a system that accounts for the interdependencies of minimum wage including the establishment of an independent advisory committee

Taking into account all of these factors, York Region recommends a system where minimum wage is reviewed by an independent advisory committee, composed of academics, low-income earners, non-earners, local governments, and large (over 500 employees) and small business

representatives. This committee would review minimum wage annually, and base their recommendation on the factors already considered by the Province as well as changes to the Consumer Price Index, vacancy rates, average cost of rent, and core housing needs. Increases would be scheduled every second year.

In addition, social assistance rates for non-earners should work in tandem with minimum wage, ensuring that an increase in one does not leave the other group more financially vulnerable. When these factors are considered together, it is possible that as with social assistance, Regional differences may be highlighted. Maintaining a minimum standard of living is not the sole responsibility of employers. Regional differences and maintaining a minimum standard can be addressed through other income supports as well as the tax-system.

Finally, more research is required to determine the demographics of people relying on minimum wage, and what more can be done to support low-income households. As a local service system manager, municipal governments are directly impacted by changes that affect the low-income population. Social assistance case loads, homelessness prevention services, and the demand of local not-for-profit low-income support programs impact our future planning and budget discussions. York Region has welcomed the opportunity to respond to the Panel, as we work with all levels of government, the community and employers to ensure an adequate standard of living is maintained in Ontario.

References:

Block, Sheila, (2013) *Who is Working for Minimum Wage in Ontario*. The Wellesley Institute

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Chairman and CEO



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Thursday, October 3, 2013

The Honourable Teresa Piruzza, MPP
Ministry of Children and Youth Services
14th Floor
56 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2S3

Dear Minister Piruzza:

Re: York Region's Submission for Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy

On behalf of The Regional Municipality of York, we are encouraged to see the Province of Ontario renewing its commitment to reducing poverty through the development of a second five-year Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy focused on breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty by helping children and their families living in poverty. Since the strategy was launched in 2008, the Province has committed to addressing poverty through:

- Investments in affordable housing – connecting people to their community and economy, and improving general well-being and social inclusion
- A social assistance reform supporting a client-centred and locally-driven system
- Increased investments for ancillary supports – child care, mental health, employment and financial services

A long-term poverty reduction strategy will need to draw upon municipal expertise to understand regional variations in poverty, learn from local strategies and integrate more client-centred approaches to providing services. In York Region, this means federal and provincial funding commitments to support affordable housing development, child care, employment supports and effective local strategies connecting families to the community-based services and supports they need to succeed.

York Region welcomes the Province's commitment to consult with governments and communities to hear how we can continue to work together to break the cycle of poverty. A new Poverty Reduction Strategy should work towards solutions benefiting our residents, our communities and our economy.

We submit York Region's response, as attached, to the Province's consultation questions as we work together towards the development of the next Poverty Reduction Strategy. If you have any questions about the Region's submission, please contact Adelina Urbanski, Commissioner of Community and Health Services, at 905-830-4444 ext. 2023 or by email at adelina.urbanski@york.ca

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Fisch".

Bill Fisch
Chairman and CEO

Attachment

Question 1:

Looking back over the last five years of Ontario's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, what worked well? What can we do differently moving forward?

- Increases to the Ontario Child Benefit increased income support for low income households in York Region.
- Increases to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program's basic allowance and maximum shelter allowance increased the number of eligible residents and helped clients meet actual costs of basic needs, transportation, housing and increased earnings exemptions.
- Funding for social housing repairs allowed housing providers to complete energy upgrades that reduced energy costs for low-income tenants.
- Both the Housing Allowance program and the Short-Term Rent Support Program were successful, cost-effective methods of providing low-income families with rent supports.
- Implementation of full day kindergarten provided financial assistance to low-income parents who would otherwise need child care.
 - At a Regional level, the provision of transportation and child care at our parenting and mental health (Transition to Parenting) groups for low-income families ensures access to our programs.
- Although the demand for child care fee subsidy continues to increase in York Region, the wait-list for fee subsidy decreased in 2013 primarily due to increased provincial funding. However, we must keep in mind that as the economy continues to recover and more people enter or return to the workforce, the demand for child care will grow.
- Expansion of the Children in Need of Treatment (CINOT) in 2009 to include 14 to 17 year olds as well as general anesthetic for five to 13 year olds. In York Region, 1,392 clients were treated since 2009.
- Implementation of the Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program which provides oral health care for children 17 years and under for families without access to dental coverage and an adjusted family net income of \$20,000 or less. In York Region, 2,860 clients enrolled and 2,236 clients received treatment since 2010.
- Implementation of the Breast Pump Discretionary Benefit Program, which is a joint program run by York Region Community and Health Services, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), to ensure participants receiving financial assistance through OW and ODSP have adequate funds to obtain a breast pump when necessary to protect breastfeeding.

Moving forward the Province can help reduce poverty through:

- Addressing the root cause of poverty
 - Increasing the basic needs allowance for social assistance
 - Strengthening the social assistance system to become client focused
 - Increasing the supply of social and affordable housing
 - Creating employment opportunities
 - Income security
 - Access to adequate nutrition

- Sustained funding for:
 - New supply of affordable housing and rent subsidies
 - Capital repairs for existing social housing
 - Home renovations for low- to moderate-income households

- Clarifying the existing poverty measure

- Investing in targeted supports to low-income families to help them avoid slipping into crisis. This should be provided within an integrated system that is outcome focused and supports municipalities to find community-based solutions to meet their unique needs.

- Developing and delivering programs with a more holistic approach

- Linking minimum wage increases to Ontario's economic performance, labour market outcomes and earnings distribution so minimum wage can be used as an appropriate 'reference wage'

- Increasing the level of supports provided outside the social assistance system to assist OW and ODSP recipients in transitioning off assistance to employment (i.e. access to basic dental supports and prescription medication)

- Investing in collaboration opportunities that address the social determinants of health and the impact on young children and families in York Region

- Increasing income eligibility threshold for the Healthy Smiles Ontario program

- Consolidation of provincial children's oral health funding programs

- Creation of oral health funding assistance for adults in need of treatment such as essential emergency care, dentures and employment readiness

Questions 2:

The first strategy focused on children. Going forward, should there continue to be a specific focus? If so, who or what should be the focus?

In York Region, we are experiencing an increased need for services and programs that serve seniors and children. In addition, we are developing a broader range of service delivery options to meet accessibility requirements and the needs of newcomers to Canada.

A number of demographic, economic and social trends have contributed to a steady increase in demand for children services in York Region. The number of children living in low-income families continues to grow. Over the past decade, the number of one parent families experienced the highest growth rate of all family types in York Region, increasing by almost 74 per cent. The gap is widening around funding, particularly for fee assistance and services for children with special needs, and there are growing wait-lists for these services.

A key component of a poverty reduction strategy should include access to child care, early intervention and recreation programs and other children's services. Having access to universal and publicly funded child care programs supports the developmental skills and school readiness of children of all socio-economic circumstances, as well as providing parents the support they need to seek and keep employment or participate in skills training and upgrading.

A long-term poverty reduction strategy will also need to plan for an increasingly aging population. In York Region, the baby boomers (aged 45 to 64) are the fastest growing age group, and this group will exceed the number of children in the Region within the next 10 to 15 years. Key approaches to reducing seniors' poverty should be towards improving health benefits (i.e. affordable and accessible dental care), providing 100 per cent provincial subsidies for assistive devices, and funding to address the long wait times for affordable and supportive housing. The strategy should target programs and services helping to maintain seniors' health, well-being, safety and independence.

Local strategies meeting community needs, connecting people to supports and services and enhancing local networks and awareness of poverty issues are essential for a successful provincial poverty reduction strategy. In York Region, several local strategies have proven effective in allocating provincial and federal funding to improve outcomes for lower income populations (i.e. single parents, newcomers, those homeless or at risk of homelessness and children and youth). These include the Community Investment Strategy, Family Strengthening Programs, Homelessness Prevention Program, the Community Plan to Address Homelessness, the Making Ends Meet initiative and the Immigration Settlement Strategy. The Province should look toward funding local models of service delivery, including targeted supports to prevent poverty and enabling municipalities to find community-based solutions that meet their unique needs.

Question 3:

What is the most important thing the Government of Ontario can do to help reduce poverty? Is there an initiative that was implemented as part of the first Strategy that should be revisited?

According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 15 per cent of the population in Canada is living in poverty – that is, struggling to pay rent, find decent employment and access nutritious and adequate food. The survey showed people living in the poorest neighbourhoods are disproportionately visible minorities, immigrants and single-parents and that women continue to earn less than men, even though they achieve higher levels of education. In York Region, low-income residents are experiencing a lack of affordable housing options, a relatively stagnant rental market and increasing housing prices. Most low-income residents working in York Region cannot afford to live in the Region.

York Region's housing market has the lowest percentage of rental housing in the GTA. In 2006, approximately, 11.7 per cent of the Region's residential units were rented which is well below the national average of 31.6 per cent, the provincial average of 29 per cent and lower than any other region in the GTA. As of October 2012, York Region's vacancy rate was the lowest in the GTA at 1.6 per cent, which is below the 3 per cent vacancy rate that indicates a healthy rental market where sufficient choice in the market prevents rents from increasing too quickly. A long-term poverty reduction strategy needs to increase housing choices for all ages and stages of a person's life; people need housing options in their communities. The Province needs to make changes to housing policy and funding that includes incentives for private sector development of rental housing.

Approaches to a successful poverty reduction strategy should also include sustained funding for social and affordable housing, housing stability programs and adequate shelter allowances for social assistance recipients. Social housing program rules are poorly integrated with other income support programs, which can create disincentives for lower-income residents to improve their circumstances. There is also a lack of support services to help vulnerable populations to live independently – social housing communities are particularly impacted when these supports are lacking for residents who have special needs.

Providing support for low-income workers and residents struggling to make ends meet is a critical element for poverty reduction. It helps people who are new to or re-entering the labour market to succeed when they find employment (i.e. post-employment retention supports). It also gives people, who are likely to remain in lower paid work, the additional resources they need to sustain themselves and their families and stay employed. More integrated policy and supports helping families transition to employment or post-secondary education can be a route out of poverty. A successful poverty reduction strategy should provide small and medium size employers with an understanding of the obstacles they may face in attracting and retaining labour, help raise awareness of the hidden labour market, support job development and placement.

For some Ontario Works clients, the transition to employment is complicated by significant social and personal barriers. If not addressed through sustained and intensive supports, this leads

to social isolation and long-term unemployment. An effective approach is providing social assistance services to higher need clients, including singles and families, to help negotiate program silos when accessing supports and to build capacity toward employment. Currently, Municipal Service Managers are not funded by the Province sufficiently to sustain these supports. Other clients living in poverty face the loss of critical supports and social benefits as they try to exit social assistance, such as families who receive rent-geared-to-income housing, child care fee assistance and student loans.

There are significant health inequities among low-income families; families living in poverty generally lack access to affordable, timely health care. A poverty reduction strategy should support health benefits such as programs for early mental health identification and supports, investing in oral health funding for emergency care, dentures and healthy baby programs.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy should build on the successes of the first strategy and continue to put resources into the Ontario Child Benefit, affordable and social housing investments, increasing income eligibility threshold for the Healthy Smiles Ontario program and other health initiatives. In addition, the Province should consider recommendations raised by the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario to improve the system including income adequacy and employment supports for social assistance recipients, as well as broader supports to low-income residents regardless of their income.

Question 4:

How can all levels of government, community groups, the private sector, and other stakeholders work together to better address the barriers that keep people from getting out of poverty (e.g. access to employment, education, child care, supports)?

Co-ordinating all levels of government, community groups, the private sector and stakeholders is crucial especially where investments are required. The government should promote human services integration so that information is shared between ministries, service managers and programs. In York Region, some collaborative partnerships have developed over time in attempts to better serve clients. However, low-income residents and residents at risk of falling into long-term poverty would benefit more from a co-ordinated systems approach that is people-centred and provides stability, housing options, employment, family and health supports.

An example of how all levels of government, community groups and other stakeholders can work together to better address the barriers faced by a marginalized group is the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP). LIP is an initiative of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and was established to use a local approach to immigration settlement and integration. LIPs collaborate with a wide variety of local stakeholders to bring about awareness of the immigration integration process, support community-level research, improve labour market outcome and increase co-ordination of effective services. There are 35 LIPs across Ontario. Many of the LIPs, including York Region, have identified economic integration of newcomers as a strategic priority in their work plans. These partnerships can be leveraged to address poverty and economic integration in newcomer communities.

Other effective approaches at working together include investing in physical or virtual Community Hubs to serve low-income neighbourhoods. The Community Hub model should include a range of community partners that identify and provide social, community and educational supports. This helps ensure programs are more accessible by those 'hard to serve'. For example, it could utilize the enhanced 18-month well-baby visit and other critical early childhood development milestones including immunization provision, to establish an ongoing relationship with children and families visiting the Community Hubs in low-income neighbourhoods.

Affordable transit is another key component of a long-term poverty reduction strategy and one that requires a coordinated approach. Affordable transit is essential to the health of people living on low income, it gives them access to employment, education, health services, food and child care. In York Region the basic needs allowance does not adequately address the cost of living, in response the Region introduced additional supports to assist clients with making ends meet through the Transit Fare Subsidy Program. The program consists of a partnership between the Region, YRT/Viva, the provincial Ontario Disability Support Program office, Ontario Works, local municipalities and community agencies. It focuses on helping Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program clients with transit costs related to employment for those who do not receive existing supports. Although access to affordable transit is only one factor in helping clients maintain employment, the Transit Fare Subsidy Program fills an ever growing gap and is

an example of an 'out of the box' approach at addressing barriers that keep people from getting out of poverty.

Existing partnerships and collaborations with municipal sector and municipal associations, such as Association of Municipalities Ontario, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, the Housing Services Corporation and the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association are critical for policy development and program support. Local municipalities in Ontario play an important role as convenors of community roundtables or as part of advocacy initiatives. They also promote the social inclusion of people living in poverty through recreation, library and cultural services provided to all residents.

Question 5:

When it comes to reducing poverty in Ontario, what would success look like in 15 years from now?

York Region has experienced a rise in low and moderate-income residents, one parent families and precarious employment, increasing Ontario Works case loads and rising housing prices. A growing number of individuals are struggling to make ends meet. There is also an influx of immigrants settling directly in the Region who find it hard to find jobs commensurate with their skills. It has become a challenge for the social infrastructure to keep pace.

A successful strategy that reduces poverty would include:

- Consistent provincial funding for community-based agencies providing services to low- and moderate-income residents. Funding amounts from the Province have not increased to keep pace with population growth and changing population demographics. As a result, agencies have long wait-lists and face financial pressures, core funding for programs would help agencies.
- Investments in affordable housing, including rental options, so low and moderate-income residents would have housing options through all stages of life
- Performance indicators for each community based on existing health indicators and social return on investment research
- A social assistance system that includes integrating local services and a simplified benefit structure. The system would remove disability, children's and health benefits from social assistance and make them available entirely outside the system to all low-income Ontarians. Providing these benefits to all low-income individuals and families would eliminate structural barriers for people trying to exit social assistance for work.
- A disability benefit outside social assistance would be introduced as a priority to help combat the high level of unemployment among people with disabilities and to improve the financial incentive to work. This would recognize there can be additional costs of living with a disability and employment opportunities and earnings may be constrained for people with disabilities.
- A tax and income transfer system that integrates benefits and tax transfers, lowers administrative costs and improves incentives for employment through lower marginal effective tax rates
- Initiatives and supports to assist internationally educated professionals in moving to employment in their sector or a related sector (e.g. mentoring, volunteering, job shadowing)
- A decline in the Region's unemployment rate and an increase in the overall number of earners in the municipality
- Reduced social assistance caseload
- A 10 per cent decrease in the number of families financially eligible for income dependent oral health program
- A decline in the number of families with 'Financial Stability', 'Housing', and/or 'Employment' as identified goals within the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program (reduced need for support in these areas)