



# Introduction

*A Measure of Health* is the fourth in a series of comprehensive health status reports produced by York Region Health Services Department. (Earlier reports were released in 1986, 1991 and 1997.) *A Measure of Health* provides information about the health of York Region's residents considered from a number of different angles. There are, for example, statistics about events such as births and deaths, about rates of disease, injury and hospitalization as well as the use of health care services. There is also information about how the social and physical environments affect health and about the prevalence of smoking and other unhealthy behaviours. As well, the report includes York Region residents' opinions about the amount of stress in their lives and how healthy they feel. Sources of the data used are listed at the end of this section.

In the past, health status reports focussed more narrowly on measures of illness, or on the absence of health. But health is commonly defined as the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being - not just the absence of disease.<sup>1</sup> Increasing emphasis has been placed on gathering information about the *determinants of health* - a wide range of factors that influence an individual's or community's level of health. Determinants of health include factors such as genetic make-up, gender, culture, level of education and income, living and working conditions, availability of health care services, the quality of water and air, the support of family and friends, as well as lifestyle behaviours such as smoking, physical activity and eating habits. Clearly, the York Region Health Services Department cannot influence *all* of these factors, but it is responsible for developing and implementing appropriate programs and services, particularly with respect to those determinants of health that are amenable to change.

All public health units in the province of Ontario are mandated by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to deliver programs to residents that address health needs in the community and that are cost-effective, efficient and based on evidence. Hence the York Region Health Services Department monitors water quality in the Region, operates sexual health clinics, offers prenatal classes, runs injury prevention clinics, screens school children for dental problems, launches initiatives to help prevent chronic diseases, and takes steps to control infectious diseases and reduce the incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases. Whenever possible and appropriate, the York Region Health Services Department works with other community agencies and with coalitions of community health and social service agencies to deliver these programs and services.





## Purpose of This Report

This report has two main purposes. The first is to provide residents with a report that clearly explains issues of public health importance, and that provides them with a better understanding of the factors that affect health in York Region and the strategies that can be adopted to improve health status. The second purpose is to make the information available - for policy and planning purposes - to other social planning agencies and groups in York Region, in order to help determine issues that require focused attention, and to inform and support the York Region Health Services Department in planning public health programs and services for residents. This report is a general assessment of the overall health status of the residents of York Region based on a range of selected health indicators. Readers may need to consult other documents if more detailed descriptive information is needed.

## How the Report is Organized

This health status report is organized into 12 chapters, and each chapter opens with a very brief synopsis of some of the key findings ("At a Glance"). The chapters are organized by topic rather than by life stages - hence there is no separate section on, for example, child health, but health topics relevant to children are described in many chapters (asthma in Chapter 8, obesity in Chapter 5). At the conclusion of each chapter, important links with other chapters in the report are outlined. Where possible, comparisons between York Region data and the provincial average are provided. Selected comparisons between York Region and the Greater Toronto Area are also in the report.

*A Measure of Health* begins with an overview of the York Region community (Chapter 1), and goes on to consider the social factors (Chapter 2) and physical environment factors (Chapter 3) that affect the health of York Region residents. The impact of lifestyle behaviours on health is considered in Chapter 5. Key indicators of the overall health status of the residents of York Region are discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapters 6 through 11, with the final chapter examining the use of health care services by York Region residents. References for all of the chapters appear at the end of the report, followed by the appendices, which include a glossary of terms, data source information, as well as maps containing 1996 and 2001 Census data for each of York Region's nine municipalities.

Throughout the report, conditions where the Region fares well, as well as those areas that require improvement, have been highlighted.

# Sources of Data

The most current and valid data available were used in the preparation of this report. The primary sources of health-related data include the following files: births, deaths, hospitalizations, cancer incidence, York Region's Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System 2001/2002, the 1996/97 Ontario Health Survey, the 1996 Canadian Census, the 2001 Canadian Census (as available) and the 2000/01 Canadian Community Health Survey. The latest Census and the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System results are the most current sources available - 2001 and 2002 respectively. Birth and death data are available from 1986 to 1999; inpatient hospitalization data are available from 1997 to 2001, while cancer incidence data cover the years 1986 to 2000.

The data presented in the report generally cover the five-year time period of 1997 to 2002, however this time frame differs depending on the data source. Data from as far back as 1986 have been included in some instances in order to demonstrate trends.

The data were acquired from various agencies including the Health Services Department and other Departments within the Regional Municipality of York, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Cancer Care Ontario and Statistics Canada. In order to protect the privacy of all York Region residents, small numbers that would make it possible to identify a person are not included in this report. More information about all data sources can be found in the Appendix.

The Regional Municipality of York makes no warranty, expressed or implied, and accepts no responsibility for any errors or omissions related to these data generally, and to the data contributed by outside sources in particular. The Region has made every effort to ensure the accuracy, currency and reliability of the data contributed to this report by its various Departments. These data are being disclosed as a public service only. The Regional Municipality of York shall not be held liable for the improper or incorrect use by anyone of any of the data contained herein. Nor will The Regional Municipality of York be liable for any loss or injury arising out of reliance upon or the interpretation of these data or any accompanying documentation.

