



Our Social Environment

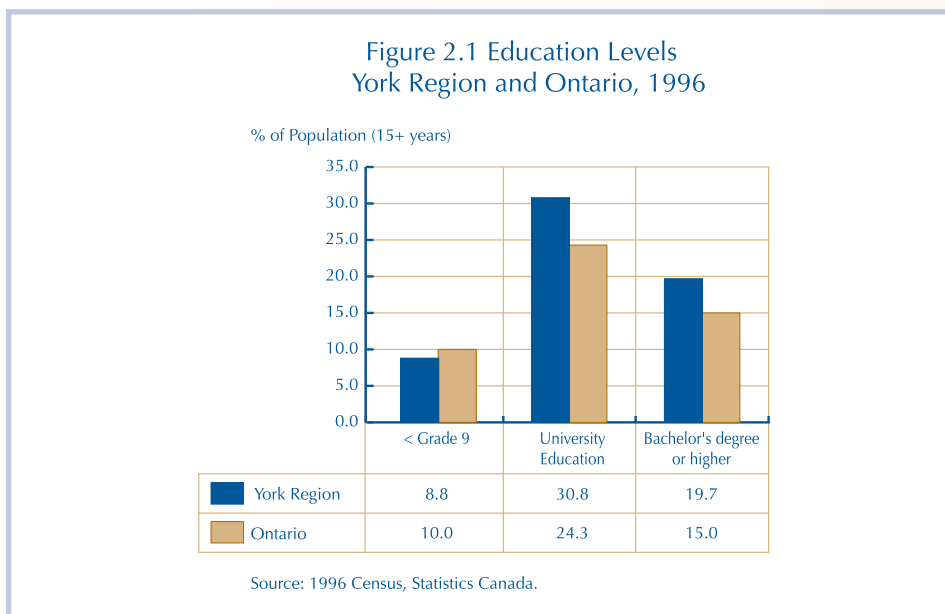
Chapter 2

Today's research shows that the health of individuals and communities is strongly associated with education and income, and with opportunities to work, play, learn and contribute to our community. Health status is also linked to where we live, how we care for each other, how much love, attention and stimulation we can give to our children and to our sense of belonging.⁸ In fact, according to the Federal Report on the Health of Canadians, 50% of the health of the population is attributable to our social and economic environments.⁹

Education

Persons with low levels of completed education tend to have fewer employment opportunities, lower incomes, and poorer health. In 1996, 8.8% of York Region's population had less than a Grade 9 education, compared to 10% for Ontario as a whole.

Figure 2.1 shows the education level for York Region and Ontario in 1996. The proportion of York Region residents with a university education (with and without obtaining a degree) was higher than that for Ontario (30.8% compared to 24.3%). Almost 20% of York Region residents had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 15% for Ontario as a whole.



At a Glance

The average household income in York Region in 1996 was \$74,277, which is higher than the average income in the GTA, Ontario and Canada. Forty-four per cent of York Region households earned over \$70,000.

The average price of a single-family dwelling increased 13%, from \$281,199 in 2000 to \$317,999 in 2001 and to \$344,936 in the first half of 2002.

Nearly 18,000 economic families and 11,000 unattached individuals were classified as low income in 1996.

The weekly cost of a nutritious food basket for a family of four living in York Region increased by nearly \$14.00 from 1998 to 2002.

In 1996, 30.8% of the population aged 15 years and over had a university education, compared to 24.3% for Ontario.

Ninety per cent of those in York Region's work force indicated they were very/somewhat satisfied with their present employment.



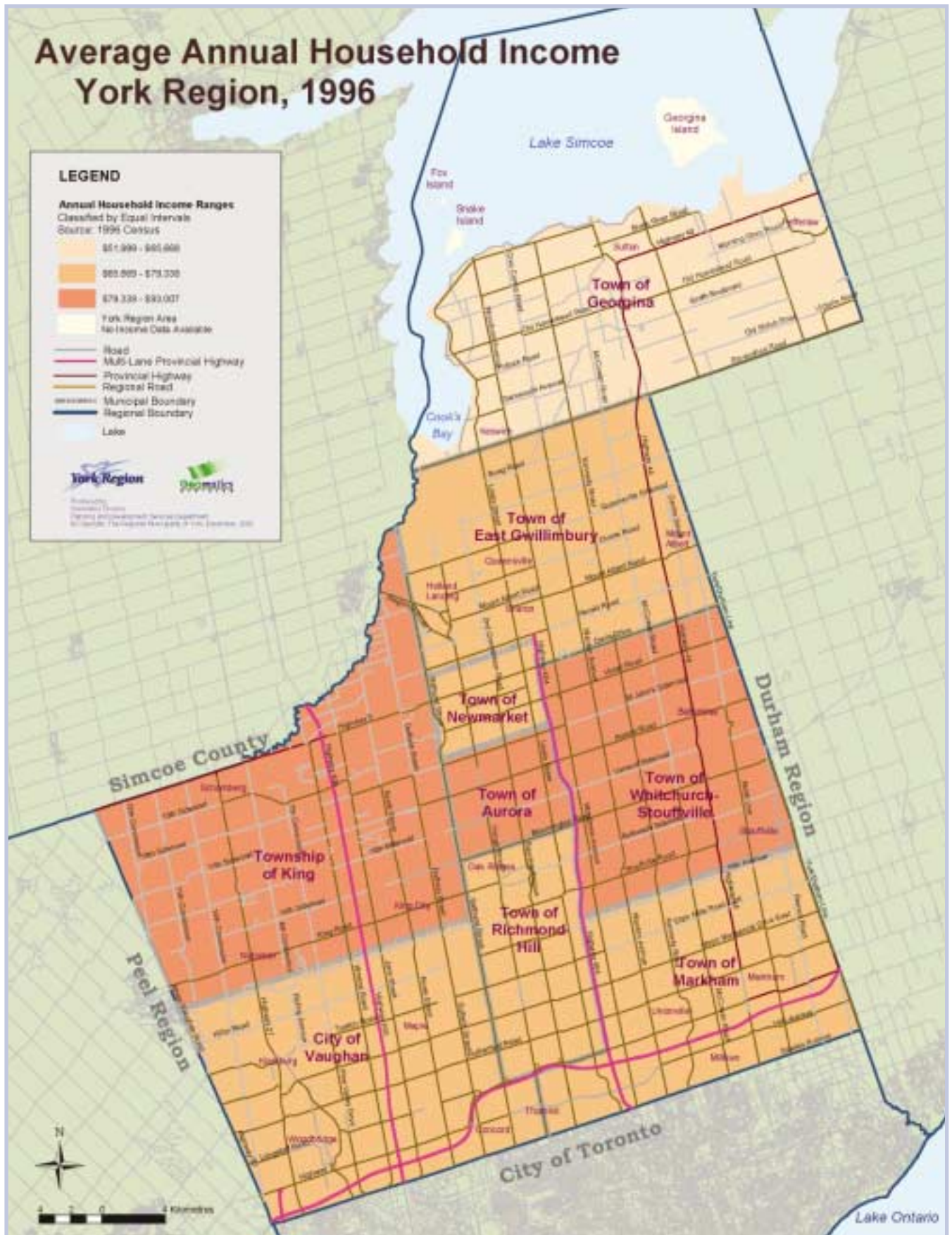
Income

Health status is closely tied to income. Wealthier people live longer than middle class people who in turn live longer than people with low incomes. However, the overall level of health in developed countries is also linked to the level of income inequality *within* the country. The greater the income gap between richer and poorer in a country, the worse the overall health of the population as measured by life expectancy and death rates. Studies show that the smaller the income gap, the lower the mortality rates.¹⁰

In 1996, the average income for York Region residents ages 15 years and over, working full-time, full-year, was \$53,370 for males and \$36,177 for females. These figures are higher than the Ontario average for males (\$45,477) and females (\$32,645).

The average annual household income in York Region was \$74,277 in 1996, which was higher than the average income in the GTA, the province and Canada. Forty-four per cent of households in York Region had incomes over \$70,000. There is a distinctive pattern in income levels by municipality, with the central municipalities having the highest household incomes and the northern-most municipality having the lowest annual household income (Map 2.1).

Map 2.1 Average Annual Household Income, York Region



Source: 1996 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada.



Employment

York Region's workforce (ages 15 and over) was approximately 319,300 persons in 1996, with males accounting for 53%, and females 47%. In 1996, 46% of York Region's labour force reported having post-secondary education. This was higher than the Ontario average of 41%. As of December 31, 2001, the estimated number of jobs in York Region was 395,000, distributed among approximately 25,000 employment locations.¹¹

The top five York Region employment industries in 1996 (by proportion of workforce engaged in employment) were as follows: manufacturing (15%), retail trade industries (13%), business services industries (10%), health and social services industries (8%), and wholesale trade industries (7%).

Historic data suggests there is a shift in emphasis within the Regional economy away from secondary production activity to the knowledge-based office sector. This does not appear to be a rapid shift since the manufacturing sector, for example, is still expanding. However, the strong recent growth in office-based employment is an important indication that the Regional economy is in step with the global trend towards an information-based economy.¹²

Work Stress

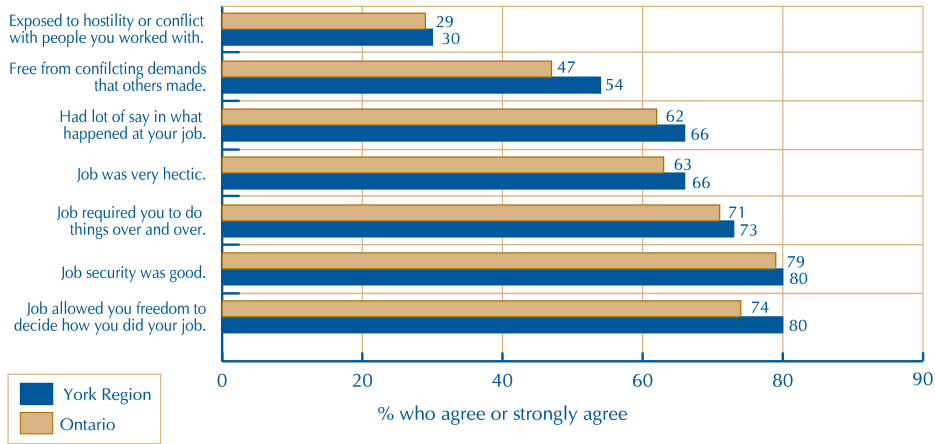
Work stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker.¹³ Work stress can lead to poor health and even injury.

York Region respondents between the age of 15 and 75 who worked at a job or business at any time in the past 12 months were asked to evaluate their work situation as part of the 2000/01 Canadian Community Health Survey. Stress on the job among York Region workers is similar to the provincial average based on exposure to hostility, level of job security, and required repetitive tasks (Figure 2.2). In terms of a positive work situation, more York Region workers indicated they had a great deal of job input and job discretion compared to their counterparts across Ontario. When asked about levels of job stress, more York Region workers agreed that their job was very hectic.

During 2000/2001, 90% of York Region respondents (labour force ages 15 years and over) were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their job, which is the same as the Ontario average (Figure 2.3).

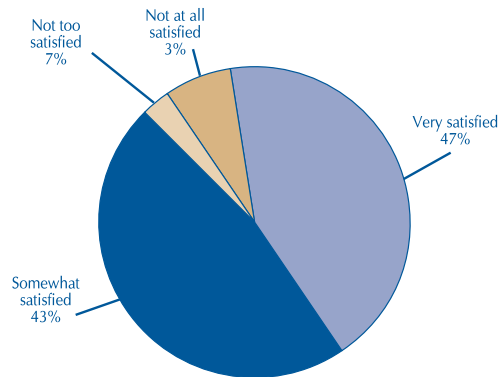


Figure 2.2 Selected Work Stress Indicators
York Region and Ontario, 2000/2001



Source: Canadian Community Health Survey 2000/2001, Cycle 1.1, Statistics Canada, 2002.

Figure 2.3 Satisfied with job
York Region, 2000/2001



Source: Canadian Community Health Survey 2000/2001, Cycle 1.1, Statistics Canada, 2002.



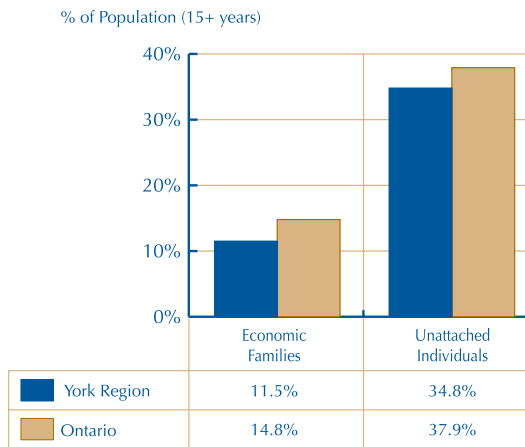


Low Income

The number of low-income families and unattached individuals is on the rise in York Region. Statistics Canada defines "low-income cut-off" levels for families based on total family income, place of residence, and number of members in the household. Using the cut-off levels for 1996 (based on 1995 income levels), 11.5% of economic families or nearly 18,000 families living in York Region were defined as being low income, up from 8% in 1991 (based on 1990 income levels).

Figure 2.4 shows the percentage of York Region and Ontario populations considered to be low-income. Ontario had a higher proportion of economic families classified as "low-income" compared to York Region in 1996.

Figure 2.4 Prevalence of Low-Income Families and Individuals
York Region and Ontario, 1996



Source: 1996 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada.

The proportion of unattached individuals living with low incomes was 34.8%, or nearly 11,000 people in 1996, up from 30% in 1991. The rate of low income for both families and persons living alone has increased between 1991 and 1996 for both York Region and Ontario.

In York Region, the proportion of single parent families increased from 13.0% in 1996 to 14.8% in 2001. This represents nearly 23,000 single parent families. The majority of these families are headed by a female parent (81.9% in York Region and 82.5% in Ontario). In 1996, a total of 3,710 single parent families in York Region or nearly 1/3 of the total number, were classified as low income.

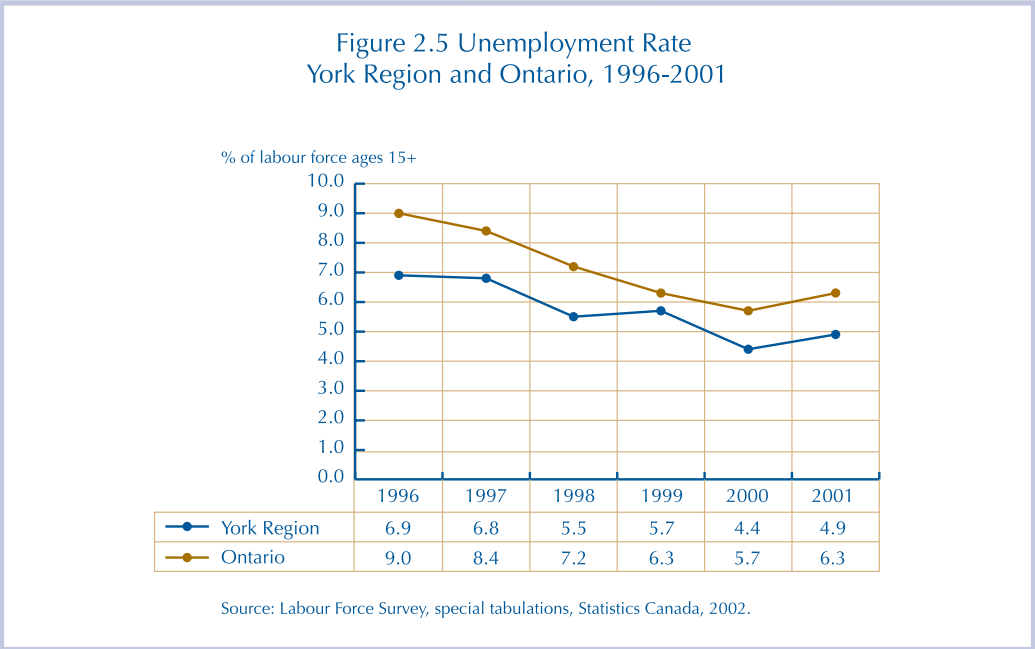


Poverty compounds the stresses that families face and can have a negative effect on a child's development. In 1996, 14% of children in York Region aged 0 to 17 were considered to be low-income individuals. In comparison, 22% of Ontario children aged 0 to 17 were considered to be low-income individuals.

Unemployment

Unemployment is associated with increasingly difficult living conditions, low socioeconomic status and health and social problems.

Unemployed people and their families suffer an increased risk of psychological consequences, financial problems, and illness or premature death.^{14,15} In 2001, the unemployment rate among those aged 15 and older in York Region was 4.9%, compared to Ontario's rate of 6.3% (Figure 2.5).



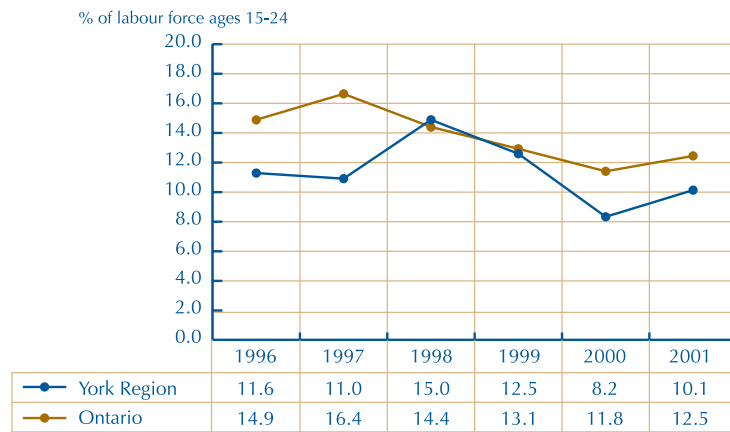
In 2001, the number of workers in York Region on Employment Insurance ranged from a period low of 6,352 in June to a period high of 9,265 in December. The average number of workers on Employment Insurance in 2001 was 7,576 per month.¹⁶





The youth unemployment rate (those aged 15 to 24 years) for York Region is higher than the level of unemployment experienced by any other age group. The youth unemployment rate grew from 11.6% in 1996 to a high of 15% in 1998 then reached one of its lowest rates in six years, at 10.1% in 2001 (Figure 2.6). This rate of unemployment means that in 2001, nearly 11,000 young men and women aged 15 to 24 in York Region were without work.

Figure 2.6 Youth Unemployment Rate
York Region and Ontario, 1996-2001



Source: Labour Force Survey, special tabulations, Statistics Canada, 2002.

Social Assistance

Another measure of the adequacy of income is the percent of the population that receives social assistance. The Ontario Works program focuses on providing supports to help participants gain employment while providing temporary financial assistance to meet basic needs. Approximately 1.1% of York Region's total population or nearly 9,000 York Region residents received Ontario Works assistance in 2001.¹⁷ In comparison, 15,600 residents were part of the program in 1995.

Social Support

People with more social support generally enjoy better physical and mental health. In the Ontario Health Survey 1996/97, social support was measured by asking respondents if they had: someone to confide in, someone they could count on in a crisis, someone who could give them advice and someone who made them feel loved. Scores on this Social Support Index were then transformed into three categories of low, medium, and high.



In York Region, 90% of the population aged 12 and over reported high levels of social support and only 3% said they had low social support. Similar figures were reported for the province - 89% high social support and 5% low social support.

A person's degree of social participation is another way of measuring social support. The 1996/97 survey asked respondents if they belonged to any organizations or associations, how often they participated in the activities of these organizations, and how frequently they attended religious services. Approximately 25% of seniors in York Region reported that they participated in organizations or associations at least once a year. This proportion was lower than the participation rate in Ontario (34%).

Sixty two per cent of York Region's seniors reported that they attended religious services. Again, the rate of Ontario seniors participating in religious services was slightly higher at 65%.

Support from families, friends and communities is linked to better health. For seniors living alone, isolation from others can be a major concern. The proportion of seniors aged 65 and over living alone in York Region communities was 16.2% in 1996, slightly less than the 17% in 1991. In comparison, Ontario had a higher proportion of seniors living alone in 1996 (27.6%).

Housing

Housing affordability and availability are issues for York Region. Figure 2.7 shows that in 1996, 25.1% of York Region homeowners were paying 30% or more of their household income on housing, compared to 18.5% of Ontario homeowners. The comparable figures for renters were 41.6% in York Region and 44.1% for Ontario. More homeowners in York Region spent more of their income on housing compared to the provincial average. This is related to the affordability of housing and the high cost of purchasing a home in York Region.

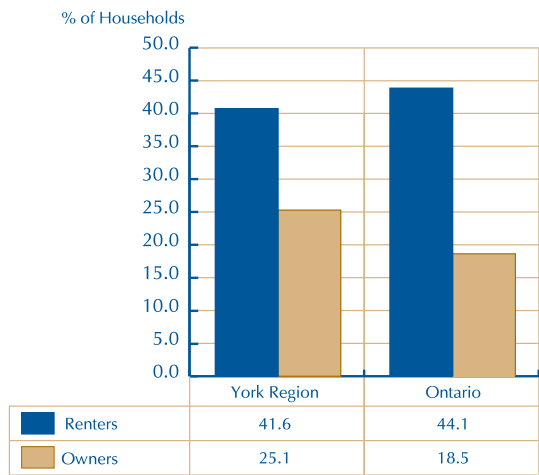
The average price of a single-family dwelling in York Region increased from \$281,199 in 2000 to \$317,999 in 2001 and to \$344,936 in the first half of 2002.¹⁸ Prices tend to be higher in the southern part of York Region compared to the northern part.

Since 1995, no new social housing units have been built in York Region. In 1998/99 only 0.1% of all dwellings built in York Region were rental properties and the vacancy rate was at 0.7%, which was well below the rate required for a competitive, healthy rental market.¹⁹ According to York Region's 2002 Housing Supply Strategy, nearly 5,000 York Region households are on the waiting list for social housing.²⁰ In addition, rental housing demand is increasing.





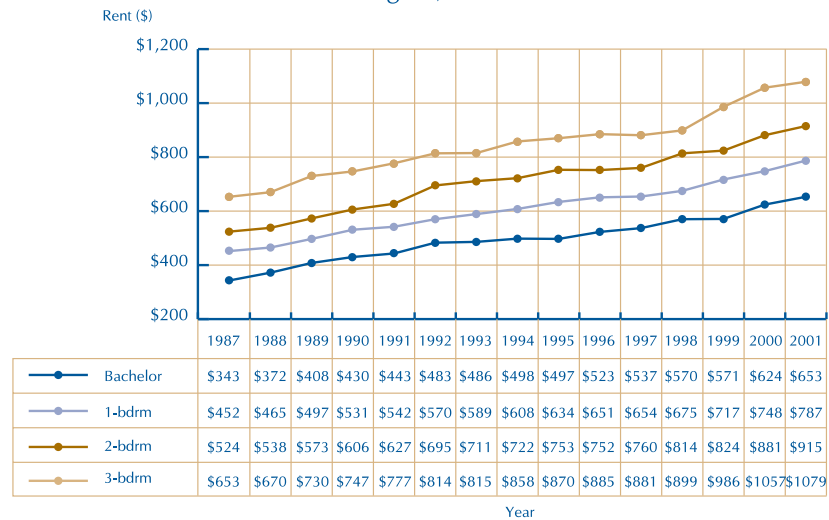
Figure 2.7 Households Paying 30% or More of Household Income on Housing, York Region and Ontario, 1996



Source: 1996 Census, Statistics Canada.

According to the Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation (CMHC), rental prices in York Region have increased steadily over the last 15 years. Between 1987 and 2001, the rent for a bachelor apartment increased by 90% from \$343 in 1987 to \$653 in 2001. In addition, 1-bedroom, 2-bedroom and 3-bedroom apartment rents increased by 74%, 75% and 65% respectively (Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8 CMHC Average Rents York Region, 1987-2001



Source: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2002.



The York Region Housing Supply Strategy focuses on practical steps that can be taken together with our community partners to create affordable housing choices for all low and moderate income households in our community. Housing is an integral component of the Region's Growth Management Strategy and is tied to important Regional initiatives such as Transit, Economic Development, Human Services Planning, and Vision 2026.

Homelessness

The relative wealth of York Region and its residents can mask the fact that some people are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.²¹ Many people face the prospect of having no place to live or are already dependent on shelters, friends, relatives and the streets for accommodation. Disparity in incomes, barriers to affordable housing and rapid urbanization are just a few of the risk factors for homelessness in York Region. Shelters are a critical front-line support for those who have no other accommodation.²² They are the first and best opportunity to identify homeless people and bring them into contact with support services. The use of the four shelters in York Region has risen steadily between 1996 and 1999, during which time the number of shelter days provided grew by 7,248 or 38%.²³ Because its homelessness problem is minor relative to larger cities like Toronto, York Region has the opportunity to learn from experiences of other cities about both preventing homelessness and identifying solutions.

Food Access and Security

A community enjoys food security when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, nutritious, safe, personally acceptable and culturally-appropriate foods, which can be obtained in a manner that maintains human dignity.²⁴

Food access in York Region is monitored through a variety of means including the cost of a nutritious food basket, reported food insecurity incidence, and use of food banks.

The Ontario Nutritious Food Basket is a measure of the cost of healthy eating. It is a listing of 66 foods that are priced as an estimate of the average cost of feeding individuals and families. The Nutritious Food Basket includes only basic food items and does not include foods from restaurants, packaged convenience foods, snack foods, frozen pre-cooked foods, pre-made soups, sauces, and items for food preparation such as spices. Items are priced at the lowest cost available, regardless of brand name. Items such as coffee, tea, condiments and sauces are accounted for by a 5% factor added to the total cost of the basket. These figures are updated annually.

Working for You

The Regional Municipality of York has played a leadership role in housing within the Region and has launched or completed a number of initiatives. York Region:

- Owns and manages 1,695 housing units;
- Administers 6,131 affordable housing units;
- Lowered tax rates for multi-residential units;
- Is working to link labour force issues to housing issues;
- Adopted a Housing Supply Strategy (Regional Council, June 27, 2002);
- Produced a Homelessness Task Force Report in 2000 and
- Published the York Region Housing Directions Report in 2000.

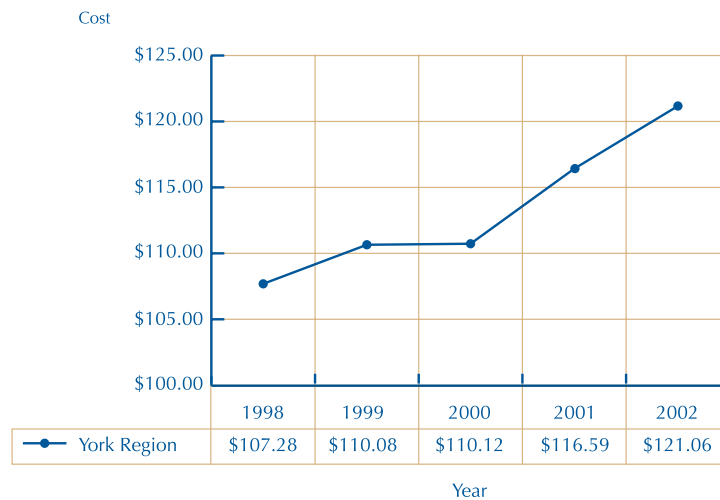


Working for You

Nutrition Services works closely with two community-based organizations: the York Region Food Security Steering Committee and the York Region Food Network. The York Region Food Security Steering Committee brings agencies and volunteers together to address food security issues in York Region.

Food basket costs change depending on the family structure (for example, single person, one-parent family, etc.), ages of adults and children, and whether a woman is pregnant or breastfeeding. For a reference family of four (defined as a man and woman, 25-49 years of age, boy aged 13 years and girl aged 7 years) the weekly food basket cost in York Region has increased by nearly \$14.00 in five years (Figure 2.9). In 2002, a family of four spent, on average, \$121.06 a week on food compared to \$107.28 in 1998. The weekly cost of a nutritious food basket for Ontario was \$118.95 in 2001.

Figure 2.9 Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket for a Family of Four York Region, 1998 to 2002



Source: York Region Health Services Department, Dental and Nutrition Services, 2002.

Of York Region's adult population (18 years and over), 8.5% stated they had food access and security issues within the past 12 months, according to the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System 2001/2002. These issues might include worrying about not having enough to eat because of a lack of money, not eating the quality or variety of food due to a lack of money, or not having enough food because of a lack of money.

Use of Food Banks

The use of food banks is another indicator of the level of food insecurity in the community. There are nine food banks located within York Region, and other emergency food programs such as soup kitchens, food voucher programs and outreach vans. In 2001, the first year of full data collection, an average of 2,900 visits a month were made to a York Region food bank. Nearly 2/3 of all visitors were single parent or two-parent families with dependents at home. On average, nearly 50% of all food bank recipients were children under the age of 18 years.



Child Care

As previously discussed, the number of low income households is on the rise, as is the percentage of homeowners and renters paying more than 30% of their income on housing. As a result, some York Region families can place their children in licensed child care spaces only if they receive some assistance with the fees. In 2001, York Region had an estimated total of 16,840 licensed child care spaces (centre-based and home-based). The average cost of care for one child, full year, at a centre was \$8,707 and \$8,313 at a home-based day care.²⁵

In 2001, 1,683 households were in receipt of child care fee assistance for a total of 2,678 children. Of these, 71% were single-parent families and 29% were two-parent families. Unfortunately, there is a waiting list for child care fee assistance, and in 2001, 747 families were waiting for subsidized child care.²⁶

This chapter has discussed many important social factors that have an impact on health. Chapter 5 (Lifestyle Behaviour and Health), outlines some related factors, including smoking, misuse of alcohol, and physical inactivity. All of these behaviours, while practised by individuals, are strongly influenced by the individual's social environment. As a result, the social environment is strongly associated with chronic and infectious diseases (Chapter 8 and Chapter 10), and with a number of injuries (Chapter 9). There are also some associations between the social environment and mental health (Chapter 11).

