



# Conclusion

Overall, York Region residents enjoy healthy lives. Residents have the longest life expectancy in the province and the Region's unemployment rate is lower, and its proportion of university-educated residents is higher, than the provincial average. The population is diverse and includes a higher-than-average proportion of immigrants to Canada compared to other parts of the province. York Region is one of the fastest growing regions in the province and the average household income is higher than the average for the Greater Toronto Area, Ontario and Canada. Overall, as the data presented in this report show, residents of York Region score better than the Ontario average on almost every key health indicator.

But York Region faces challenges that must be recognized and addressed if the Region is to improve and/or maintain this level of health. The Region, like most of Canada's other urban centres, faces the challenges described in "Canada's Urban Strategy - A Blueprint for Action", a report by the Prime Minister's Caucus Task Force on Urban Issues released in November 2002. Those challenges include an aging population, urbanization, growing cultural diversity, and a widening income gap. A unique challenge for York Region is its extremely rapid pace of growth with a higher-than-average proportion of immigrants. In addition, as explained in the "Fair is Fair: Health Care Investment in York Region" report (released by the York Region Human Services Planning Coalition in October 2002), York Region health and social services programs have historically been under funded by the provincial government compared to the per person funding allocated to other regions. This situation is further complicated by the current rapid population growth in the Region and the accompanying demands for service. The combination of all these factors will influence the status of the Region's health in the future.

As *A Measure of Health* outlines, health is not only the absence of disease. Health status is determined by many factors, including the physical environment, income, education, employment, lifestyle choices, housing and social connectedness. 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 that are amenable to change.





The Health Services Department, in conjunction with its partner organizations and agencies, must therefore continue to monitor the factors that affect health, with a special emphasis on the social determinants of health.

A key to better health outcomes for York Region residents is the sharing of data, obtained through surveillance of the population, with partner organizations and agencies. Information sharing can help those from different perspectives better understand our community's assets and needs. It also, importantly, offers a shared language - common ground - for our community's hope for the future.

Information sharing allows for data-driven decision making when we, as a community, focus on health-related planning, policy development and resource allocation. Data shed light on key issues, challenges and accomplishments and can be used to stimulate interest and focus efforts to improve the health of all our residents.

And so *A Measure of Health* is not just a document, it is also a tool that can be used to advocate for a healthier community and a healthier future.

Advocacy, policy development, the use of preventative methods and appropriate technology, timely responses to new and emerging diseases, the provision of programming to respond to the needs of our residents and long range planning - all these will be required in order to maintain and improve the health status of the residents of York Region.

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.

The York Region Health Services Department, working together with its multiple partner organizations and agencies, will continue to "promote, protect and enhance the health and safety of the people of York Region." In doing so, the efforts of the Health Services Department fall within many of the goal areas of the Regional Municipality of York's Vision 2026 initiative: Creating Strong, Caring, Safe Communities. The Vision 2026 document outlines eight goal areas for action. Although the programs and services provided by the Health Services Department can be seen to address components of all eight goal areas, the following six are the most relevant to the Department's work: Quality Communities for a Diverse Population; Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture; Responding to the Needs of Our Residents; Managed and Balanced Growth; Infrastructure for a Growing Region; and Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region.

The Health Services Department will continue to recognize the diversity of the Region's population with an emphasis on those most vulnerable to health disorders. The Department will promote healthy, safe communities through all of its activities and through the sharing of data with our partners.

In the future, reports on the health status of York Region residents will focus on a specific subject or health concern, for example Infectious Diseases, Injuries or Child Health. It is anticipated that these reports will be presented on an annual basis. Updated health status data will be posted, as it becomes available, on the Regional Municipality of York website at [www.region.york.on.ca](http://www.region.york.on.ca).

*A Measure of Health* will be widely circulated to all associated health, social service, government, and planning organizations, and to York Region schools and libraries. Copies will be available to the public through the Regional Municipality of York website ([www.region.york.on.ca](http://www.region.york.on.ca)), the Information Kiosk at the Regional Administrative Building in Newmarket and from the Health Services Department. Please contact us at (905) 830-4444 ext 4105 or toll free at 1-877-464-9675 ext 4105 or through *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653.

Health is both a collective and an individual responsibility. There are also steps that you can take to improve your own and the community's health, and some of these are found in the section that follows, "Keep York Region Healthy: Get Involved With Your Health!".





# Keep York Region Healthy: Get Involved With Your Health!

## Stop smoking and keep your home smoke free.

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in Canada and an important risk factor for other diseases, yet almost a quarter (23%) of York Region residents identified themselves as smokers - the majority of them daily smokers. If you haven't taken up smoking-don't start! If you smoke, seek out the best way for you to cut down or quit.

Environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) is associated with a number of illnesses. When possible, avoid places with ETS. Take the first step to a healthier home -- ask family members and visitors to your home to smoke outdoors.

## Exercise regularly.

A prescription for health includes 60 minutes of exercise every day! Walk, jog, swim, or bike-- it's your choice! Over 45% of York Region residents reported that they do not exercise on a regular basis. Physical activity helps prevent a number of illnesses - including heart diseases and osteoporosis. Exercise can also be a great stress reliever. You'll feel better!

## Make healthy eating choices.

With our fast paced lives, it can require some attention to eat a well-balanced diet, but the result is better overall health. Canada's Food Guide to Health Eating is a good place to start. Call the Health Services Health Connection Line at 1-800-361-5653 for more information or visit our website at [www.region.york.on.ca](http://www.region.york.on.ca)

## See your family doctor (at least annually).

Be sure to have an annual check up even if you are feeling well, so that your doctor is able to practice preventative medicine and detect any illness in its early stage.





### **Practice preventative behaviours.**

Many simple and common sense things, when practised on an ongoing basis, can make a big difference to your health and that of your family. These include washing your hands regularly, especially before you eat and when you are ill, and remembering to put on sunscreen before you work or play outdoors for an extended period of time - in all seasons! In the summertime, wear long sleeved shirts and long pants if you need to be outdoors at dusk and/or dawn and use the proper insect repellent to ward off mosquitoes. Don't swim in posted beach waters. Be careful when preparing food. Don't undercook meat and keep food stored appropriately.

### **Obtain regular dental care.**

Dental problems can be painful and can cause poor health in other body systems, such as cardiac disease. Be sure to see a dentist on a regular basis for preventative maintenance. If you require financial support to provide dental services for your children call the Health Services Health Connection Line at 1-800-361-5653.

### **Ensure your children are immunized on schedule and that pets are vaccinated.**

Vaccination programs provide good basic protection for most children against vaccine-preventable diseases. Rabies vaccination is mandatory in York Region for all domestic dogs and cats.

### **Follow a screening schedule.**

The Canadian Cancer Society recommends mammography screening for older women every two years, yet only 62% of York Region women aged 50 to 69 had a mammogram in the past two years. As prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in York Region men, it is recommended that males discuss screening for this type of cancer with their family physician.

### **Be safe when travelling.**

If you drive a car, use your seatbelt and correctly strap your child into an approved child seat carrier. If you ride a bike, wear your helmet and use a light after dark.



## Get involved ... volunteer!

Try to make the time to volunteer. Other people in York Region, particularly seniors, hospitals and long-term care facilities could use your help, and you'll enjoy the benefit of making a contribution to your community.

## Recognize the growing income gap in York Region.

The number of low-income families is on the rise in York Region, and the high cost of shelter means many residents are spending a high proportion of their income on shelter and/or are at risk of losing their housing. Consider supporting others through donations to food banks and breakfast programs and /or advocating for services.

## Recognize stress.

Seek assistance and support when you feel yourself suffering from too much stress. Talk about how you feel to a trusted friend or family member and be sure to set aside time for yourself. Consider joining a support group - for example, a bereavement group if a family member or friend has died or a new mothers' group if you are coping with a new baby.

## Care for your environment.

Whenever possible, make choices that are good for the environment. Take York Region Transit (YRT) when you can, and don't drive or idle your car unnecessarily. Reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides on your property, and check your well water regularly. When replacing appliances and fixtures, choose energy saving and low water flow devices for your home. These can be accessed through York Region's Water for Tomorrow program.

Need more information? Call the Health Services *Health Connection Line* at 1-800-361-5653 or visit our website: [www.region.york.on.ca](http://www.region.york.on.ca).

