

# UNIONVILLE COMMONS SENIORS HUB NEEDS ASSESSMENT UPDATE

## What We Heard Report 2023

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Please contact: [communityhubs@york.ca](mailto:communityhubs@york.ca)



# Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge York Region is located on the traditional territory of many Indigenous peoples such as the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat and Métis peoples and the treaty territories of the Haudenosaunee, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Williams Treaties First Nations. This land is now home to many diverse Indigenous peoples. York Region is located within the boundaries of the Nanfan Treaty, Treaty 13 and the Williams Treaties. There are also other land claims and treaty rights involving portions of York Region that have not been resolved. The Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation is a Williams Treaty First Nation and the closest First Nation community to York Region.

# Introduction

In 2018, York Region completed a Unionville Commons Seniors Hub (Seniors Hub) community engagement and needs assessment study. The study identified and prioritized programs and services to be considered for the future Seniors Hub. In 2023, the Region updated the 2018 needs assessment study to better understand current community needs and identify how needs may have changed since 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Both needs assessment studies will help inform design of the Seniors Hub and the programs and services offered.

During the 2023 needs assessment update study, the Region consulted with Unionville Commons tenants, York Region residents, subject matter experts and a range of partners and interested parties. This report summarizes engagement results with residents and community agencies. The Seniors Hub project is an action from York Region's 2016 Seniors Strategy and a continued action in the new updated 2024 to 2027 Plan to Support Seniors.





# About the Seniors Hub

York Region is building a seniors hub on the ground floor of Unionville Commons, a seniors' housing building located at 4310 Highway 7 East in the City of Markham. The Seniors Hub will provide inclusive and accessible seniors-focused programs and services for residents of Unionville Commons and the surrounding communities to create an age-friendly, complete community and support seniors to age in the right place.

**The Seniors Hub will consist of 11,000 square feet of space and will include the following amenities:**

- A large, multi-purpose space
- An outdoor patio
- Multiple storefront spaces for partner organizations



# About the Engagement Process

**York Region's public engagement process focused on how needs may have changed since the 2018 needs assessment study. To share information, answer questions and gather feedback, York Region organized the following engagement activities:**

- One in-person engagement session with partner agencies at Crosby Community Centre on October 16, 2023
- Two virtual engagement sessions with members of the public on October 23 and 24, 2023
- Two in-person engagement sessions with members of the public at Angus Glen Community Centre on October 25 and 26, 2023
- One virtual engagement session with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee on November 22, 2023
- An online survey



# Public Engagement Notifications

## Public engagement activities were promoted through:

- A [York.ca/SeniorsHub](https://york.ca/SeniorsHub) campaign page
- Printed posters
- Print and digital advertisements in community newspapers
- Paid social media posts on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter)
- A Housing York Inc. (HYI) [electronic newsletter](#)
- Notifications via public electronic newsletters, including [#yrmatters](#), and internal electronic newsletters
- Road signs placed at intersections nearby to the location of the Seniors Hub
- Postcards distributed at a seniors fair in City of Markham
- A digital toolkit for City of Markham staff and elected officials to share through their networks
- Electronic information board displays at City of Markham recreation centres
- Email notifications to external partners, including Older Adult Clubs
- A [Markham Review media story](#)

Figure 1: Example of campaign poster



Figure 3: Example of social media post



Figure 2: Example of mobile street sign and community centre electronic information board





# Questions Asked During the Needs Assessment Study

1

What types of services and programs do you currently use to support your health, well-being and independence?

2

What challenges do you face in accessing seniors' services and programs?

3

How did COVID-19 impact (positive or negative) the services/ programs that you accessed? Are you still experiencing these opportunities/challenges?

4

What types of programs, services and amenities would you like to see at the future Seniors Hub to support your health, well-being and independence?

5

Is there anything that would help you access and/or participate in activities at the Seniors Hub; for example, transportation, mobility, Internet, cost, wayfinding, time/convenience?



# Results

## Summary

Overall, the updated needs assessment showed that many needs have remained consistent since 2018; however, community members expressed that loneliness, isolation and grief are significant impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for community programming, recreation and accessible spaces has grown. Mental health challenges have increased. Social isolation has increased the need for connection and support. Service partners also noted many seniors are now caregivers at risk of burnout.



## Programs and Services Currently Used

**When asked what types of programs and services seniors currently use to support their health, well-being and independence, respondents noted the following:**

- The most accessed programs identified through the survey were health care and recreation programs
- Physical health and recreational programs help support mental health and social connection. This includes exercise programs, swimming, table tennis, pickleball, tai chi and board games
- Culture and community programs and services, such as art and music classes, knitting, bible-sharing groups and photography
- Learning and education programs and services, including nutrition programs, IT classes, English lessons and financial services that offer seniors assistance with banking and long-term financial planning
- Healthcare services, such as physiotherapists, podiatrists and massage therapy
- Mental health supports, including counselling, grief support, outpatient counseling and family counselling

† Based on 105 survey respondents. †† Physical health services that are most used currently include family doctors, podiatrists, dentists and optometrists.



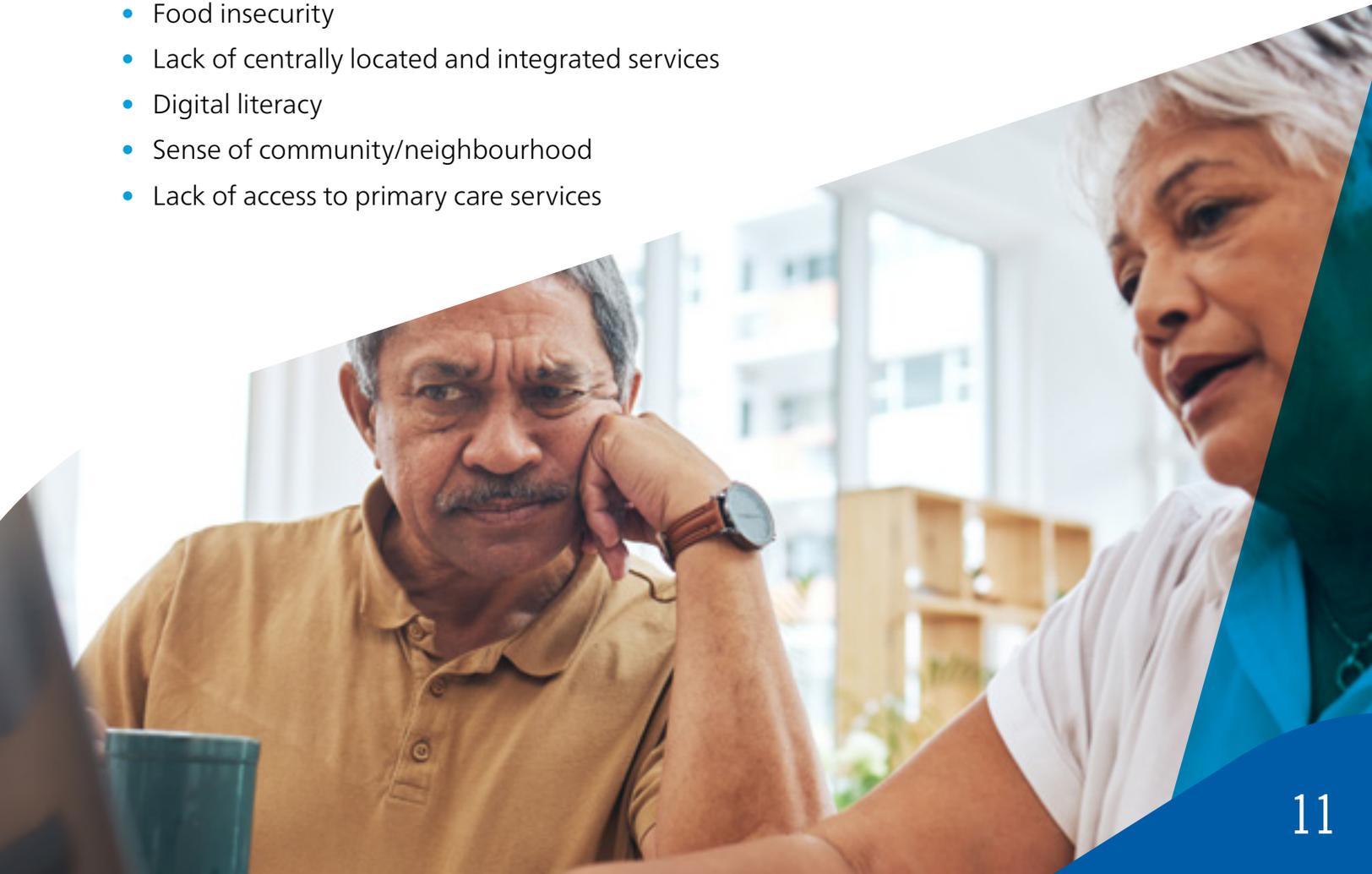
# 51%<sup>†</sup>

**OF SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS USED  
PHYSICAL HEALTH  
SERVICES<sup>††</sup>**

# Challenges Facing Seniors

**Respondents identified many challenges accessing and participating in seniors' programs and services, including:**

- Distance to travel to access programs and services, especially for those using mobility devices
- The cost and frequency of public transportation
- Parking availability
- Language and cultural barriers, including limited translation services and availability of programs and services offered in languages other than English
- Program and service affordability
- Access to information, including knowing when or where programming is happening
- Not enough program capacity and long waitlists
- Overcrowding at programs, which felt unsafe due to COVID-19 concerns
- Difficult registration processes
- Lack of respite care, as many seniors are caregivers themselves
- Insufficient indoor space availability, especially during cold winter months
- Food insecurity
- Lack of centrally located and integrated services
- Digital literacy
- Sense of community/neighbourhood
- Lack of access to primary care services





## Impacts of COVID-19

**The COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on the types of programs and services seniors accessed and how they were accessed. When asked, respondents noted the following impacts of COVID-19:**

- Many programs ended or were paused
- Seniors experienced social isolation, which increased mental and physical health challenges
- Some respondents noted they do not feel safe interacting with others in person due to ongoing health concerns
- Transportation options were limited
- Equitable access to services was a challenge
- The need for food banks increased
- The transition to virtual programs was a significant challenge
- Stigma and racism increased
- The caregiver burden increased
- Some respondents noted positive changes, including programs moving to online formats, which improved access
- Many respondents noted a desire to return to in-person programs and services, but would like virtual options and the ability to rejoin in-person programs at their own pace
- Many respondents noted that COVID-19 risk mitigation measures, such as masking and distancing, would be preferred for in-person programs





## Future Opportunities

**When asked what types of programs, services and amenities seniors would like to see at the future Seniors Hub, respondents noted the following:**

- Physical and movement-based activities, including exercise and fitness classes, yoga, a gym, dance, sports, a recreation room with a pool table, foosball, shuffleboard and carpet bowling
- Healthcare services and supports, including a medical clinic, a wellness centre, a pharmacy, alternative therapies, foot care, dentistry, vision care and fall prevention
- Social programs including dance, music and art classes, card and board games, bingo, mahjong, photography club, gardening, family activities, and travel opportunities such as day trips and bus tours
- Support from a dietician
- Classes on breathing exercises, memory improvement activities and mindfulness classes
- Cooking classes for individuals and groups, and workshops to learn about healthy eating, aging, grocery shopping and heart disease
- Workshops on technology, where seniors can learn basic uses and functions of computers, cell phones and data security, and how to prevent scams



**52%<sup>†</sup>**

**OF SURVEY  
RESPONDENTS ARE  
INTERESTED IN USING  
RECREATION SERVICES<sup>††</sup>**

<sup>†</sup> Based on 105 survey respondents. <sup>††</sup> Recreation services noted include fitness and exercise classes, mindfulness classes, and workshops on healthy living.

- Amenities, such as a library and workshop space for carpentry or mechanical hobbies
- Personal support programs and services, including support with home care, such as cleaning, showering and meal preparation
- Assistance with applying for government programs and accessing York Region housing and support services
- Supports to improve independence, including offering shuttle buses to grocery stores, malls and day trips
- A café where seniors can meet, hang out with friends and build community
- Spaces for social activities, rentable multi-purpose rooms for friends and family gatherings
- Intergenerational programming, such as storytelling or performances by high school bands or drama classes
- Worship services in different languages, such as Cantonese and Mandarin
- Mental health counsellors and therapists to support seniors' health and independence
- Supports for mental health and managing dementia diagnoses
- Financial and legal supports to help seniors with financial planning, taxes and estate planning
- Volunteer opportunities
- Cultural exchange activities, such as language classes, meal sharing, seminars and talks
- Hot meal delivery



## Access and Participation

When asked what would help seniors access and participate in activities at the future Seniors Hub, respondents noted the following:

- Transportation services to assist seniors arrive at and return from the Seniors Hub safely and comfortably, including volunteer pick-up programs, coordinated group transit, ride-sharing and underground parking. Respondents noted seniors require special considerations for transportation options during winter months due to slippery sidewalks and road conditions. Seniors also need to know how to access transportation support programs and services.
- Support using the Internet to access program information, register for programs and participate in virtual programs, and ensuring webpages are designed for seniors
- Provide in-person staff assistance
- Ensure programs and related equipment, such as phones, computers and Internet, are affordable
- Daytime programs are preferred
- Coordinate programs with other community centres in the area to prevent redundancy
- Recognize and respond to the demographic diversity of seniors and offer programs specific to younger and older seniors
- Consider different activity levels and capabilities and provide equal opportunities for seniors with invisible disabilities, such as hearing loss and speech disabilities
- Provide signage, webpages and instructions in multiple languages to support access for diverse seniors



### PREFERRED SERVICE FORMATS<sup>†</sup>

42% IN-PERSON

36% IN-PERSON AND ONLINE

15% ONLINE

7% OTHER<sup>††</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Based on 105 survey respondents. <sup>††</sup> Respondents who chose "other" said their choice depends on the prevalence of COVID-19, their personal health status and the time of the program or service.





# How This Feedback is Being Considered

Findings from the updated needs assessment study will inform decisions on programs and services offered at the Seniors Hub.

York Region will continue to engage the community, including the addition of a Seniors Hub Advisory Group, which will provide input, feedback and advice on strategic planning, operational activities and continual improvements for the Seniors Hub. The Seniors Hub Advisory Group will be diverse and include York Region residents, local community agencies, Unionville Commons tenants, and staff from City of Markham and York Region. York Region will continue to seek opportunities to work with the community to create a Seniors Hub that best serves and meets the needs of the diverse seniors within the community.



## Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback!

Feedback collected will help inform the development and operations of the Seniors Hub.

The Seniors Hub is scheduled to open in 2025.

### For more information about the Seniors Hub

**WEB:** [York.ca/SeniorsHub](https://york.ca/SeniorsHub)

**EMAIL:** [CommunityHubs@york.ca](mailto:CommunityHubs@york.ca)

**PHONE:** Access York at 1-877-464-9675

TTY: 1-866-512-6228 (for deaf or hearing impaired)

