

# Renewing our Plan for Seniors

## COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

*Last updated: February 2022*

York Region's senior population is growing faster than any other age group. By 2031, one in five residents will be over the age of 65. The [York Region Seniors Strategy](#) was approved in 2016 to better define our role in supporting seniors. After 5 years of continued growth and change in our communities, we wanted to refresh our strategy and reached out to York Region seniors and caregivers to help renew our **plan for seniors**.

The feedback and experiences shared through an online survey and two public open houses will inform a renewed Seniors Strategy and Two-Year Action Plan. This Plan will be presented to York Regional Council in June 2022 and outline how York Region will work to support seniors at all ages and stages of life.

**This document consists of questions** we received from the community during the virtual open houses on January 5, 2022. A video recording of the presentation is also available at [york.ca/PlanForSeniors](http://york.ca/PlanForSeniors).

For more information about York Region programs and services, please contact Access York Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (excluding holidays) at 1-877-464-9675.

### Who is responsible for providing services for seniors?

Services and supports to enhance the lives of seniors are provided by many partners including community agencies and all levels of government.

As a Regional government, **York Region** supports seniors by delivering programs such as:

[Adult Day Programs](#)

[Client Intervention and Support Services](#)

[Housing with supports](#)

[Long-Term Care](#)

[Mental health consultations for seniors](#)

[Healthy aging and fall prevention](#)

[Seniors Dental Program](#)

[Seniors Home Support Program](#)

[Subsidized housing](#)

[Rent and utility assistance](#)

[Ontario Works](#)

[Paramedic and Community Paramedicine Services](#)

[Public Health tips and advice](#)

[York Region Transit](#) and [Mobility On-Request](#)

[Personal Medical Information Kits](#)

### YORK REGION

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**Local municipal governments** provide services such as overseeing local parks, recreation programs for seniors, snow clearing, sidewalk repairs, building permits, fire services as well as garbage and recycling collection.

**The Provincial government** is responsible for planning and funding health care services including primary care, home and community care, mental health supports and long-term care. The provincial government also provides funding supports for certain Regionally delivered services and tax credits.

**The Federal government** is mainly responsible for income supports like Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security.

For more information about which services are delivered by York Region and your local municipal government, please consult our [“Who do I Call?”](#) contact list.

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## **What actions has York Region completed since the Seniors Strategy began in 2016?**

With so many partners involved in providing services for seniors, the York Region Seniors Strategy defines actions, where the Region delivers programs, and policies we need to advocate for where other levels of government have jurisdiction.

Since the adoption of the [York Region Seniors Strategy in 2016](#), York Region has implemented several actions and advocacy efforts to support aging in place.

### **Actions undertaken by York Region**

The following are highlights of what the Seniors Strategy team has recently accomplished.

To improve system navigation for seniors, **York Region has partnered with Findhelp Information Services** (one of the service providers for 211 in Ontario) to provide seniors and caregivers access to more relevant and up to date information on services.

To access [211 Central Ontario](#), dial 2-1-1 on your phone or call toll-free at 1-877-330-3213

**Unionville Commons is currently being constructed** in the City of Markham. Once complete, Unionville Commons will provide 265 apartments for seniors with a mix of affordable and market rent units. A public community centre and seniors hub offering seniors-focused services to the community are also included as part of this development which aligns with the direction in the Seniors Strategy to design and implement multi-service centre / hub models. Construction began in 2019 and the first residents are expected to move in at the end of 2022 and into 2023. Substantial completion of Unionville Commons is anticipated in 2023 with the seniors hub and community centre anticipated to open in 2024. **York Region expanded transportation options** through York Region Transit which includes Mobility On-request for those travelling to day programs and medical appointments.

These initiatives (and others) are highlighted in a letter to the [Minister Cho re: York Region Response on Ontario’s Seniors Strategy Consultation](#) as well as in the September 2019 [Seniors Strategy Performance Update \(September 2019\)](#) and [York Region Seniors Strategy Update \(April 2018\)](#)

## **Advocacy efforts by York Region**

The [November 2020 Forecast for Long-Term Care and Seniors' Housing Implications](#) Council Report highlighted a significant unmet need of almost 15,000 long-term care beds across York Region by 2041. This report also stressed the needs of seniors cannot be met by long-term care alone. Significant investments in additional affordable housing options for seniors and a range of supports to help seniors age in the community are required. The report was shared with key provincial decision makers to seek their commitment for collaborative efforts and funding to address these needs.

In January 2021, York Region presented a [submission to the Ontario Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission](#). The York Region Submission was also shared with key provincial Ministers and Deputy Ministers to further express the need for action in the long-term care sector and across the broader continuum of care.

## **What are the timelines for action?**

The Seniors Strategy is an ongoing initiative that will continue to be an important consideration for York Region. Based on feedback from stakeholders and residents, an updated strategy and a Two-Year Action Plan will be presented to York Region Council in June 2022.

The Two-Year Action Plan will allow staff to focus efforts to deliver effective improvements in the short term, taking into account the impact of the pandemic and lessons learned moving forward. The updated strategy will include longer term actions and opportunities for advocacy.

## **When will you have another public open house for seniors?**

The feedback we collected will help inform the Seniors Strategy Refresh and Two-Year Action Plan, including identifying new opportunities and initiatives for York Region, which could include future engagement opportunities.

## **Where can we get more information about the seniors hub and community centre being constructed in Markham? Will seniors be consulted in its development?**

A seniors hub and community centre will be located on the ground floor of the [Unionville Commons](#) community housing development to provide services that support the health and well-being of residents living in the building and the wider community.

York Region engaged residents and partners in 2018 to better understand needs and to identify potential programs and services at the hub and community centre. Over 450 responses were received through surveys, focus groups, partner panels and pop-up consultation sessions at local community centres.

Additional community consultation will be undertaken in 2022 and 2023 to review and validate findings from community consultations in 2018. A Planning Advisory Committee will also be established in 2022 to provide feedback and advice on matters related to planning, operating, evaluating and continually improving the seniors hub and community centre.

Anticipated to open in 2024, the seniors hub and community centre will offer a broad range of programs and integrated services that are accessible to seniors and that encourage social participation, wellness and enable residents to age in place. An update on the implementation of the seniors hub and community centre was provided to Regional Council on December 16, 2021 For more information about Unionville Commons, please visit [york.ca/unionvillehyi](http://york.ca/unionvillehyi)

## **Is transportation free or subsidized for seniors? Can you provide more information about transportation and what that looks like right now for seniors?**

Seniors aged 65+ are eligible for a seniors fare when using the PRESTO card or YRT payapp on York Region Transit (YRT). Senior [Fare Rates](#) includes conventional routes, rapid transit and Mobility On-Request (MOR paratransit and conventional). For each paid fare, travellers receive a **two hour travel window** allowing them to travel across York Region using public transit. Travellers can get on and off YRT as many times as they like within the 2 hours transfer window, and can transfer from YRT conventional service to MOR without an additional fare required. YRT also has cross-boundary fare agreements with Durham Region Transit (DRT) and Brampton Transit (BT); therefore there is no extra cost to transfer within the 2 hour transfer window. Travellers also receive a discounted fare when transferring from YRT onto GO transit services.

MOR 65+ service is available across York Region for seniors 65 years or older who may be feeling hesitant taking regular public transit during this time. Mobility On-Request uses smaller vehicles like sedans, minivans and small buses to transport customers. Vehicles are thoroughly cleaned, drivers are equipped with proper PPE and there is a limit to the number of passengers allowed in the vehicles at once. Seniors travelling simply call YRT at [1-866-744-1119](tel:1-866-744-1119), and YRT will pick them up and take them to their desired location within 5 km of their home. This can be a grocery store, doctor's office, pharmacy or any other address. Additional information can be found at: <https://www.yrt.ca/en/our-services/mobility-on-request-65-service.aspx>

Mobility On-Request Paratransit: is a shared ride, accessible public transit service for people with disabilities. Eligibility is considered on a case-by-case basis and is not based on a particular disability, nor is it based on income level or lack of accessible public transit in an applicant's area. MOR recently created the "Call One" which is the first program of its kind in Canada to simplify trip booking across accessible transit services assisting travellers with getting around the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) by public transit. All aspects of cross-boundary travel across the GTHA, as coordinated by MOR staff, helping passengers feel more secure and comfortable while they travel. Additional information can be found at the following link: <https://www.yrt.ca/en/our-services/mobility-on-request-paratransit.aspx>

**Travel Training:** YRT offers travel training for York Region citizens of all ages and abilities who need additional knowledge and skills in order to use YRT independently. Additional information on myRide Travel Training can be obtained via email [myride@york.ca](mailto:myride@york.ca) or by telephone 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75867.

**Support person card** permits a support person to travel on all YRT services with the eligible customers (cardholder) who require support when travelling at no additional cost. Additional information can be found at: <https://www.yrt.ca/en/our-services/mor-paratransit-support-person-assistance-card.aspx>

For more information, please visit [yrt.ca](http://yrt.ca)

## **Why is there such a long waiting period for seniors to get into affordable housing?**

York Region manages a subsidized wait list for residents who apply for subsidized housing in the Region.

At the end of 2020, there were over 15,800 households on the wait list for affordable housing in York Region. Currently, over 40% of individuals on the wait list are seniors. Low turnover and limited supply mean applicants are waiting years for a subsidized unit to become available.

In early 2021, York Regional Council passed a resolution declaring a housing affordability crisis. York Region is committed to building complete communities with a full range of housing options and services to support residents at all ages and stages of their lives. This commitment includes working with provincial and federal partners to invest in more affordable housing options.

The Region will continue to advocate for provincial investments in home and community care, affordable housing for seniors and support services to allow seniors to remain in their homes longer and age-in-place in their communities. The [November 2020 Forecast for Long-Term Care and Seniors' Housing Implications](#) Council Report highlights the need for more significant investments in additional affordable housing options for seniors and a range of supports to help seniors age in the community are required. The report was shared with key provincial decision makers to seek their commitment for collaborative efforts and funding to address these needs.

## **What are the plans for more assisted living in home supports?**

The provincial government is undertaking health care system transformation which offers an opportunity to reimagine seniors' care to support aging in place in their homes and communities.

York Region is a partner in three Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) serving York Region communities. Under the OHT model, health care providers (including hospitals, doctors and home and community care providers) work as one coordinated team. Our participation is driven by our desire to have strong, caring, safe communities and to ensure we have a strong system to support the needs of this critical population of seniors.

The Region will continue to advocate for provincial investments in home and community care, affordable housing for seniors and support services to allow seniors to remain in their homes longer and age-in-place in their communities.

## **What percentage of the seniors' budget is allocated to aging in place?**

Since there is no specific area solely responsible for seniors, there is not a specific budget line item for seniors. Many programs support seniors along with other vulnerable residents in York Region.

## **Are there plans to build more long-term care homes in York Region?**

Funding to build new long-term care beds is provided by the provincial government.

Currently, there are 29 long-term care homes in York Region with an estimated 4,041 long-term care beds. Two of these homes are operated by York Region, namely Newmarket Health Centre with 132 beds and Maple Health Centre with 100 beds.

The provincial government has announced new long-term care projects in York Region with plans identified for 2,034 new beds and 354 upgraded spaces.

Long-term care is only one component of the full continuum of care for seniors. The Region will continue to advocate for provincial investments in home and community care, affordable housing for seniors and support services to allow seniors to remain in their homes longer and age-in-place in their communities.

### **What are the lessons learned through the pandemic around technology?**

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, technology has played a pivotal role in keeping seniors safe, connected, active and healthy. Many programs ran virtually, with many organizations now moving to a hybrid model because seniors feel more supported, connected and comfortable with technology.

The COVID-19 Community Coordination (3C) initiative is a partnership between York Region, [United Way Greater Toronto](#) (UWGT), local municipal partners, community organizations and other key stakeholders to support York Region's most vulnerable residents during COVID-19. A Seniors Cluster Table was established in April 2020 to better identify and respond to the gaps, needs, trends and any local emerging opportunities. This table provides the opportunity to engage community partners and identify opportunities for collaboration to support local needs.

One of the successful collaborative funding projects coming out of the Seniors Cluster Table, led by Human Endeavour as anchor agency, is the Technology Assistance Support for Seniors (TASS). Working with partners including York Region, CHATs, Vaughan Community Health Centre, the TASS project is providing seniors with easy-to-use tablets, and access to a technology support helpline. For more information about this program including how to refer a senior, please visit [humanendeavour.org](https://humanendeavour.org)

### **Are there any plans to lobby Internet providers to reduce their rates for seniors?**

York Region is working to improve access to high-speed broadband in our communities. Through our own network, operated and managed by [YorkNet](#), we are building an affordable, reliable and sustainable network across York Region. Investments from our provincial and federal partners, [announced in August 2021](#), will allow York Region to expand its network by more than 500 kilometres and target more than 5,000 underserved homes and commercial or industrial properties by the year 2026.

The feedback we collected will help inform the Seniors Strategy Refresh and Two-Year Action Plan, including identifying new opportunities where the Region should advocate and encourage others to act.

## **Has York Region considered developing a book of resources available for seniors and caregivers?**

There are existing resources available to support seniors and caregivers in finding information about programs and services in York Region.

York Region seniors and their caregivers are encouraged to contact

- [2-1-1](#) for a directory of services for seniors and caregivers
- Access York for information about York Region programs and services, Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (excluding holidays) at 1-877-464-9675

To access available home and community care services, residents can call 310-2222.

Additional resources for caregivers are available through the Ontario Caregiver Organization. For more information, please visit [ontariocaregiver.ca](https://ontariocaregiver.ca)

A guide to programs and services for seniors in Ontario can be found at:  
[www.ontario.ca/document/guide-programs-and-services-seniors](https://www.ontario.ca/document/guide-programs-and-services-seniors)

## **How do seniors get a home rapid test kit without standing in the long lines on cold days?**

Testing availability is limited at this time and rapid antigen tests are not available for the general community. Please check the [Assessment Centre locations](#) website to confirm current eligibility, availability, hours and locations. Testing is also available at select [pharmacies and labs](#) in York Region.

For the latest information on the COVID-19 response in York Region, please visit [york.ca/COVID19](https://york.ca/COVID19)

For the latest information on vaccine availability in York Region, please visit [york.ca/COVID19Vaccine](https://york.ca/COVID19Vaccine)

## **How can we get hospice beds in our local municipality?**

Funding for new hospice beds is provided by the provincial government.

**The feedback we collected will help inform the Seniors Strategy Refresh and Two-Year Action Plan, including identifying new opportunities where the Region should advocate and encourage others to act.**