



# YORK REGION ACCESSIBILITY STATUS REPORT 2020

## CREATING AN ACCESSIBLE YORK REGION

An update on actions by York Region and York Regional Police to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities and implement the *York Region 2020 – 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan*



## Let Us Know What You Think

We welcome your feedback. Let us know if you have any questions or feedback about the programs highlighted in this 2020 Status Report, the *York Region 2020 – 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan* and accessibility matters in general.

To view previous Status Reports visit [york.ca/accessibility](http://york.ca/accessibility)

To request a copy in another format or to send us your comments or questions, please contact us at:

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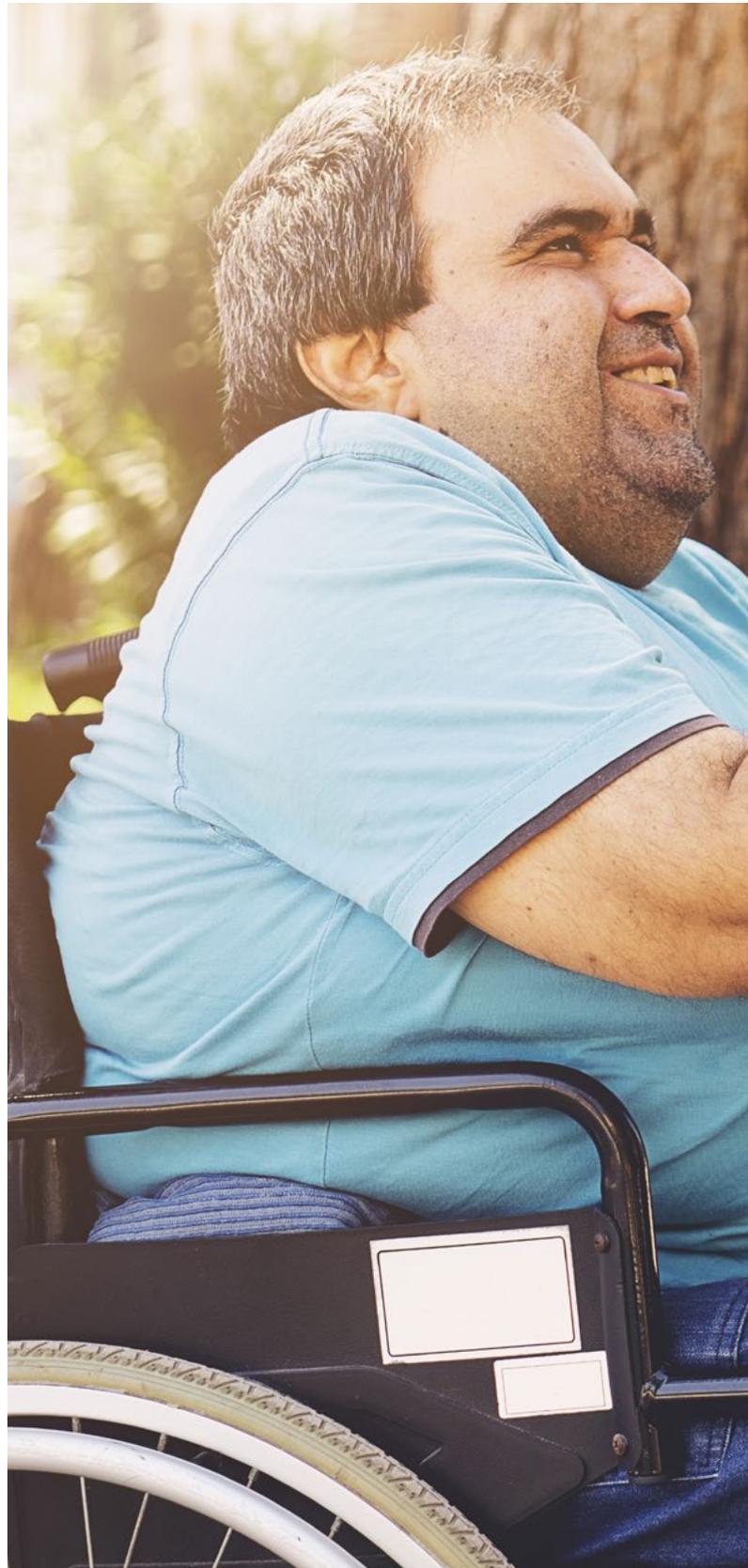
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Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Please email [aoda@york.ca](mailto:aoda@york.ca) or call 1-877-464-9675 ext. 74912 or TTY: 1-866-512-6228 (for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing)

## The *York Region Accessibility Status Report 2020*

York Region and York Regional Police are committed to creating programs, services and facilities that people of all abilities can enjoy. Accessibility not only helps people with disabilities, it benefits everyone. Creating welcoming and inclusive communities where every person who lives, works or visits can participate makes good sense for all of us.

This report highlights what we have accomplished since the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA)

became law and the actions taken to prevent and remove barriers for people with disabilities in Regional programs, services and facilities. It provides an update on actions taken to implement the Region's 2020 – 2023 Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. An Accessibility Status Report is prepared and posted annually. To review the Plan and previous Status Reports visit [york.ca/accessibility](http://york.ca/accessibility)

### **Statement of Organizational Commitment**

“The Regional Municipality of York is committed to meeting the accessibility needs of people with disabilities in a timely and proactive manner and will use reasonable efforts to provide equitable access to Regional programs, goods, services and facilities in a way that respects a person’s dignity and independence.”

Source: [York Region Accessibility Policy 2017](#)

## SETTING THE CONTEXT

This year's Status Report is slightly different from previous versions. In 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic changed our communities and our world. Although these have been challenging times for all of us, our vulnerable populations were, and remain, at an increased risk of experiencing detrimental impacts from the virus.

Persons with disabilities may:

- Have underlying health conditions that increase their physical vulnerability to the virus
- Rely on social supports that can no longer be delivered, leading to social isolation and barriers to accessing the basics of daily life
- Be at an increased risk of financial hardship as persons with disabilities were less likely to be employed than persons without disabilities prior to the pandemic<sup>1</sup>

York Region and York Regional Police's response to COVID-19 recognizes that persons with disabilities may have increased vulnerabilities. In the spring of 2020, York Region surveyed community organizations, including those that serve persons with disabilities, to identify the top needs of their clients. Identifying these needs helped York Region coordinate with community partners to deliver much needed resources and items to persons with disabilities to reduce the severity of COVID-19's impact on this group. Many York Region and York Regional Police's programs and services for persons with disabilities were adapted to ensure services could be delivered in a virtual or physically distanced format.

This report provides a snapshot of how the accessibility of York Region's and York Regional Police's programs and services was enhanced to conform to the "new normal" of COVID-19. As noted in the report, the importance of accessibility is embedded in our work and continued commitment to remove and prevent barriers.

## 2020 – 2023 MULTI-YEAR ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

In April 2020, York Region and York Regional Police updated their joint Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. This Plan highlights actions approved by York Regional Council to strengthen the accessibility of York Region's and York Regional Police's programs, services and facilities. It updates and builds on the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan approved by Regional Council in 2015. The Plan was developed with advice from people with disabilities, staff, the community and the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC). The Plan specifies new work ahead of us, including actions to help meet legislated standards and continuous quality improvement initiatives. These actions affirm our commitment to creating welcoming and inclusive communities.

## DOING MORE TO CREATE A MORE ACCESSIBLE YORK REGION

York Region and York Regional Police continue to create and implement actions to ensure programs, services and facilities are accessible for everyone.

This report highlights some of these actions.

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1 Canadian Survey on Disability (2017)

# DOING MORE TO CREATE ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITIES IN 2020

## COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELL-BEING PLAN

In fall 2020, Regional staff engaged YRAAC to hear directly from members about their thoughts on risks to community safety and well-being in areas such as crime, victimization and discrimination. York Region will develop a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan over the next year, through collaboration with residents, community partners and local governments.

The plan's goal is to help build strong, caring, safe communities where everyone can thrive. York Region is collecting feedback from YRAAC to inform the development of an inclusive plan that aims to meet the needs of all residents.



## COVID-19 COMMUNITY COORDINATION (3C) INITIATIVE

The COVID-19 Community Coordination (3C) initiative is a joint partnership between York Region, United Way Greater Toronto (UWGT), local municipal partners, community organizations and other key stakeholders. It is intended to support York Region's most vulnerable residents during COVID-19, including people with disabilities.

The 3C initiative has helped support projects that respond to key issues arising from COVID-19. One funded program involved the collaborative efforts of three partner organizations that serve seniors, which provided 300 vulnerable seniors living with low income culturally specific fresh and frozen food choices, shopper services and essential household items.



## Accessibility Planning Includes Both Legislated and Non-Legislated Actions

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA) requires organizations to meet standards of accessibility in the areas of information and communications, employment, transportation, design of public spaces and customer service.

The AODA legislation is ongoing. This at-a-glance summary shows AODA requirements that are completed and continue to be part of York Region and York Regional Police day-to-day operations:

- ✓ Accessible customer service
- ✓ Accessibility policies
- ✓ Accessible purchases
- ✓ Emergency response plans for employees
- ✓ Transportation standards
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Accessible feedback
- ✓ New websites that conform to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level A
- ✓ Employment standards
- ✓ Accessible formats and communication supports
- ✓ Design of public spaces standards
- ✓ Compliance monitoring and reporting

### ONGOING ACTIONS: WEBSITES AND WEB CONTENT COMPLIANCE

**Websites and web content:** Under the AODA, all obligated organization websites must meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA\* by January 1, 2021.

York Region and York Regional Police have implemented a plan to bring all websites owned and maintained by York Region and York Regional Police in alignment with the legislation in 2021. Results will be posted in the 2021 Accessibility Status Report.

\*Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 defines how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Accessibility involves a wide range of disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning and neurological disabilities.

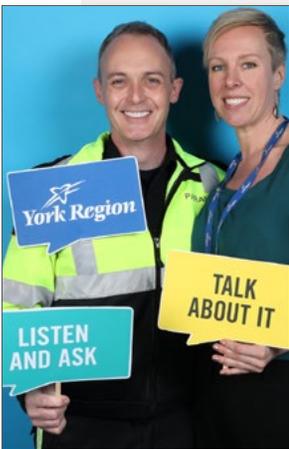
# DOING MORE TO CREATE ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITIES IN 2020



## HEALTH EQUITY CONSULTATIONS

To better understand the impact of COVID-19 on York Region's vulnerable populations during the first wave, Public Health's Health Equity Program participated in stakeholder consultations between August and September 2020. YRAAC was consulted on the impacts of the pandemic for people living with disabilities. Findings from the consultations highlighted that persons with disabilities may face challenges to receiving up to date messaging,

as well as accessing supports and services that moved to a remote or digital platform. The results of the consultations have helped inform public health activities to reduce COVID-19 transmission rates and the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups.



## PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE

Throughout 2020, York Region continued to implement the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#). Efforts included training front-line employees and managers about mental health in the workplace, anti-stigma efforts such as Bell Canada's [Bell Let's Talk](#) day and continuing to integrate the [13 Factors for Psychological Health and Safety](#) into the culture of the organization. Recognizing the incredible stress and demands placed on employees, both on the front-line and those supporting the front-line and overall emergency response, York Region has continued to support employee mental health and wellness throughout the pandemic with targeted messaging, awareness campaigns and resilience training.

## VIRTUAL CONSULTATION AND INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

At the beginning of the pandemic, in-person visits to support children with special needs at licensed child care centres and family homes ceased. York Region Early Intervention Services (EIS) expanded their service delivery to include a virtual videoconferencing option, which enabled continued collaborative consultations and intervention. EIS customers appreciated the increased flexibility in visit time and duration, increased ease to schedule and meet with multiple team members and the enhanced inclusivity of family members and caregivers.



## The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee

The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC) advises York Regional Council and York Regional Police on what can be done to enhance the accessibility of the Region's programs, services and facilities. Members come from different backgrounds and most are people with disabilities. Visit [york.ca](http://york.ca) to see upcoming meeting dates and times.

The April and June YRAAC meetings were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the latter half of 2020, YRAAC adapted to the "new normal" by transitioning to virtual format. To ensure these meetings remain accessible to our members, live captioning is provided throughout and York Region staff are available to offer technical support to members if needed. Virtual YRAAC meetings are streamed live on [york.ca](http://york.ca) and can be viewed by members of the public. The transition to virtual format demonstrates YRAAC's continued commitment to removing barriers for people with disabilities.

YRAAC participated in various consultation processes to help inform pandemic planning, including participating in a community needs survey, and advising on the impacts of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities.

### Members of the 2019-2022 York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee



**Front row (left to right):** Scott Wollin, David Hingsburger, Astley Dennis

**Middle row (left to right):** Vito Spatafora, Laurie Fortnum, Town of Newmarket Regional Councillor Tom Vegh, Lindsey Gold, Barry Martin, Joann Simmons (Vice-Chair), City of Markham Deputy Mayor and Regional Councillor Don Hamilton (Chair)

**Back row (left to right):** Angelo Tocco, Cheryl Davies, Kirsten Hill

**Not pictured:** York Region Chairman and CEO Wayne Emmerson (Ex-Officio), Sandy Palombo

Visit [york.ca/accessibility](http://york.ca/accessibility) to learn more about the members of the YRAAC.

# DOING MORE TO CREATE ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITIES IN 2020



## COVID-19 COMMUNITY SUPPORTS WEBPAGE

To connect vulnerable residents with important community supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, York Region created a [community supports webpage](#) to help people experiencing domestic violence, food insecurity, homelessness or financial hardship, as well as newcomers, seniors and persons with disabilities. This information was also made available to community agencies to share with their clients, including agencies supporting persons with disabilities.



## TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE SENIORS

Compared to other age groups, seniors are at the highest risk of serious illness due to COVID-19. Even after lockdown restrictions were eased, seniors have remained at a higher risk and many have been unable to engage in regular community and outdoor activities. To keep seniors socially engaged and healthy during COVID-19, York Region partnered with Human Endeavour, a non-profit community organization, to connect vulnerable seniors with technology. The first phase of this project connected 31 seniors in York Region's Housing program with technology support and devices.

## RISK ASSESSMENT PLANNING TOOL

York Region developed the Risk Assessment Planning Tool (RAPT) to support operations planning in a COVID environment. A section in the tool prompts staff to consider impacts to customers with disabilities, compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (2005) and consultation with YRAAC. The tool also links directly to accessibility resources.



## VIRTUAL ADULT DAY PROGRAMS

York Region’s five Adult Day Programs (ADP) closed in-person programs in March 2020 to ensure the health and safety of clients and staff. The program continued to share resources via email or mail and provide support and referral services to clients and their caregivers through weekly phone calls and weekly programming activities. By November 2020, all five ADPs implemented virtual daily programming to meet the social, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs of clients.



## YORK REGION TRANSIT (YRT) CAPITAL ASSETS PROJECTS

The YRT Capital Assets team enhanced system accessibility through various bus stop and fleet upgrades. One hundred and thirty-nine bus stops received upgraded accessible concrete platforms and 49 bus stops received accessible shelters. In addition, 28 articulated buses and two Arboc vehicles with accessible ramps, mobility aid spaces and securements were added to the fleet.

## MOBILITY ON-REQUEST COVID-19 SAFETY MEASURES

Safety is a top priority for Mobility On-Request. Various proactive measures were established to protect travellers and staff from COVID-19, including passenger screening, mandatory masks and vehicle capacity limits. In addition, drivers wear masks, face shields and arm sleeves while transporting customers and extensive vehicle cleaning protocols are in place.



# DOING MORE TO CREATE ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITIES IN 2020

## ACCESSIBLE AND SAFE FOREST TRAILS

At the beginning of COVID-19, York Region recognized the much-needed health benefits York Regional Forest provides. Stricter rules were implemented to ensure forest trails and parking lots, including the three accessible trails, remain safe and inclusive places for everyone. Forest users must always leash their dogs, practice physical distancing of two metres, wear a face mask or covering where physical distancing is challenging, pick up and remove pet waste and act kind and responsibly. New temporary signage has been installed at all entrances, and Forestry staff monitor the trails and parking lots regularly to remind people of these new rules.



## YORK REGIONAL POLICE USE VIRTUAL SIGN LANGUAGE

The clever use of modern technology allows officers to quickly, safely and effectively assist community members who communicate through sign language. Most York Regional Police patrol vehicles have removable tablets that virtually connect with agencies who can help officers communicate in sign language with residents who are deaf or hard of hearing.





## ACCESSIBLE RAPIDWAYS

Rapidways on York Region’s busiest roads bring new travel options, which are welcoming to everyone. More than dedicated lanes for buses, these projects are complete street revamps that bring accessible sidewalks, crosswalks and stations to our city centres. By the end of 2020, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation will have opened the last 6.5 km of nearly 34 km of rapidways – helping make York Region more accessible.



## VAUGHAN METROPOLITAN CENTRE HUB

Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (VMC) is one of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area’s (GTHA) fastest-growing transit-oriented communities. In 2020, transit customers continued to enjoy accessible connections to bus rapid transit on Highway 7 and the TTC subway below, as well as an accessible underground path to the SmartVMC Bus Terminal.

## ADMINISTRATIVE CENTRE WASHROOM RENOVATIONS

The Property Services Branch of Corporate Services is giving the washrooms at York Region’s Administrative Centre at 17250 Yonge Street in Newmarket a facelift. During the design, Property Services staff met with YRAAC to gather their expertise while planning accessible features such as clearly identifying the accessible sink as designated for persons using assistive devices, adding bright lighting and ensuring there were no sharp corners on accessories.



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