

Clause 20 in Report No. 12 of Committee of the Whole was adopted, without amendment, by the Council of The Regional Municipality of York at its meeting held on September 21, 2017.

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Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation

Committee of the Whole recommends adoption of the following recommendations contained in the report dated August 22, 2017 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. Council endorse the comments provided to the Federal Consultation on Poverty Reduction as set out in Attachment 1 to this report, including:
 - a. Existing government programs seeking to address poverty can be improved by providing more flexibility and long term funding commitments for affordable housing to maintain and protect existing social housing, and to build new affordable housing. In addition, they may be improved by promoting progressive employment, improving employment standards and providing more comprehensive social assistance; and
 - b. Key programs that are missing in addressing poverty include access to oral health care as part of the universal health care system, and a national Early Learning and Child Care Framework.
2. Council forward any additional feedback on the Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy directly to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

Report dated August 10, 2017 from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services now follows:

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Council endorse the comments provided to the Federal Consultation on Poverty Reduction as set out in Attachment 1 to this report, including:
 - (a) Existing government programs seeking to address poverty can be improved by providing more flexibility and long term funding commitments for affordable housing to maintain and protect

existing social housing, and to build new affordable housing. In addition, they may be improved by promoting progressive employment, improving employment standards and providing more comprehensive social assistance; and

(b) Key programs that are missing in addressing poverty include access to oral health care as part of the universal health care system, and a national Early Learning and Child Care Framework.

2. Council forward any additional feedback on the Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy directly to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

2. Purpose

This report requests Council endorsement of staff comments provided to the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation (Attachment 1) conducted by Ministry of Families, Children and Social Development. The Ministry has confirmed that any additional comments by Council in September may also be submitted, despite that the consultation deadline has passed.

3. Background

Participating in the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy supports the Region's efforts in supporting low to moderate income residents

In York Region, population growth and changing demographics continue to impact Regional programs and services. More residents are living with low to moderate incomes, are facing increased unemployment and/or insecure employment, and are finding it harder to obtain quality affordable housing. Further, low to moderate income residents also have less access to employer-funded health benefits and in addition, tend to find it harder to access quality and affordable child care. York Region has implemented a variety of programs and services to meet the growing needs of our residents, however, a coordinated effort from all levels of government is still needed. Participating in the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy helps to address the growing demands of residents in such a coordinated manner.

Region provided a submission to the federal consultation process on poverty reduction in July 2017

In July 2017, staff made a submission to the Government of Canada's online consultation process on poverty reduction. The consultation was open to both individuals and organizations, to help inform the development of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy. The original deadline of July 31 was later amended to August 31, 2017. The Region submitted to the online consultation's original deadline prior to the amended deadline in August.

As a direct result of the timing, there was insufficient time to bring this item forward for Council approval prior to submission. Staff has confirmed with the Ministry of Families, Children and Social Development that any additional feedback arising from consideration of this report by Council in September may also be submitted.

Region's submission was consistent with previous submission to the Provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy

In preparing its submission to the Federal consultation, staff reviewed the Region's submission to the Provincial consultation on poverty reduction made on [November 7, 2013](#). An overview of the Province's final Poverty Reduction Strategy was provided to the Committee of the Whole on [January 8, 2015](#).

4. Analysis and Implications

Community and Health Services Department's submission focuses on the main reasons people struggle, how existing programs can be improved and key programs that are missing

An online survey was provided for institutions and organizations to make submissions to the Federal Consultation on Poverty Reduction. The Region's submission (Attachment 1) included the following key points:

- **The main reasons people struggle:**
 - Low and moderate income residents are challenged by the growing gap between household income and the high cost of living.
 - The lack of a multifaceted approach that complements the interrelated components of the social determinants of health.
- **How can existing government programs be improved?**

- Provide more flexibility and long term funding commitments for affordable housing to support: capital repairs for existing social housing and new supply of affordable housing.
- Support income security strategies by promoting progressive employment, improving employment standards and provide more comprehensive social assistance or expand the Basic Income Guarantee as a national initiative.
- **What key services or programs are missing?**
 - A national Early Learning and Child Care Framework; evidence suggests that effective children's services policies boost employment, reduce gender inequality and promote child development, particularly for struggling families.
 - Access to oral health care for all Canadians as part of the universal health care system. Poverty is a key social determinant of health, including oral health.

Federation of Canadian Municipalities' submission outlined 12 recommendations that are aligned with the Region's submission

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) has made a submission for the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy titled, *Ending Poverty Starts Locally* (Attachment 2). In their submission, FCM outlined 12 broad recommendations such as strengthening intergovernmental dialogue, prioritizing social and affordable housing repair and construction, and increasing access to quality child care for low income households — all of which are aligned with the Region's submission.

Federal Government will use information gathered from the online consultation process and roundtable discussions to inform the development of Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy

As a next step in the process, the Federal Government will be holding roundtable discussions with stakeholders; Indigenous organizations; businesses; community organizations; academic experts; and Canadians who have experience with poverty. The information gathered from the online consultation process, along with the information gathered through in-person roundtables across Canada, will inform the development of Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

5. Financial Considerations

There are no financial considerations for providing a submission to the Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation.

6. Local Municipal Impact

The development of Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy in the future may have impacts on residents, particularly those with low to moderate income.

7. Conclusion

The Region will continue to monitor the Federal Government's progress towards development of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy.

For more information on this report, please contact Lisa Gonsalves, Director of Strategies and Partnerships, at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 72090.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

August 10, 2017

Attachments (2)

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Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request

Online Survey: Questions/Answers The Federal Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultation

1. What poverty-related programs or services does York Region provide?

The Region provides a number of programs and services that are targeted to low-income residents, including:

- The Access York contact centre which provides information, referrals and application services for York Region programs and services. It provides efficient service navigation for residents experiencing multiple barriers
- Social Services that focus on helping clients become economically stable by helping them to gain or maintain employment, and/or obtain financial support to afford basic living needs. Examples of some of the initiatives include:
 - Positive Leisure Activities for Youth (PLAY) provides free access to sports and recreational programs to children and youth ages 4 to 18 years old and single parents receiving Ontario Works;
 - Housing Stability Program (HSP) - York Region residents who are receiving Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits may be eligible for financial assistance for rental or, mortgage arrears, utility arrears and/or reconnection, last month's rent and other housing stability supports to help residents obtain and/or retain their housing;
 - The Transit Fare Subsidy Program (TFSP) assists eligible OW and ODSP clients between the ages of 18 and 64 with their transportation needs for finding or maintaining employment. Eligible OW clients currently receive a discount of 75% off the full price of an adult monthly YRT/Viva pass. Eligible ODSP clients receive a 50% discount. The Region is also working to implement a low-income transit pass.
- The Home Repair Program, developed for homeowners with low to moderate income, provides financial support for daily living or for critical repair expenses. There is no user fee for this service, and the Region pays the contractor directly.
- Healthy Smiles Ontario (part of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy), aims to improve oral health and overall health outcomes for children and youth to decrease the economic burden on families.
- Housing strategies such as York Region's 10-Year Housing Plan, to enhance housing supports for people receiving social assistance.
- Regional strategies such as:
 - York Region's Seniors Strategy, and
 - low-cost or free public health programs such as Healthy Babies, Healthy Children.

- The Human Services Planning Board (HSPB) which focuses on housing supports for low and moderate income residents, as well as progressive employment.
- Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) which provides financial assistance to York Region residents who are homeless, living in emergency housing/temporary shelter or at risk of losing their housing, in order to prevent households from experiencing homelessness and to keep households at risk of homelessness to remain housed.
- The Community Investment Strategy (CIS) which provides annual funding for community/agency programs that are focused on low-to-moderate income residents that are often very hard to reach.
- In 2017 CIS funded a number of community/agency programs that are directly related to addressing poverty in York Region, including:
 - Two Seasonal Shelter Programs for residents experiencing homelessness offered by Inn From the Cold and Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold;
 - The Jewish Russian Furniture Depot offered by the Jewish Russian Community Centre of Ontario;
 - Information and Case Management services offered by The Housing Help Centre;
 - The Peer Support Outreach Worker Program offered by Lance Krasman Memorial Centre;
 - The LOFT Crosslinks Street Outreach offered by LOFT Community Services;
 - The Eviction Prevention Program offered by the Community Legal Clinic of York Region; and
 - The development of a Three Year Strategic Plan for Inn From the Cold seasonal homeless shelter.
- The Property Tax Relief for Seniors and Low-income Disabled Persons program provides qualified persons with a deferral of their property tax increment (year-over-year increase). Recipients do not pay, and the tax amount owing remains on their account and is repaid once the house is sold.
- The Newcomer Strategy which supports the Region's ongoing vision for settlement and integration of newcomers with a focus on setting newcomers and their families up for success. This includes:
 - The Local Immigration Partnership initiative to establish multi-sectoral community partnership councils to develop and implement local settlement strategies to improve access to and coordination of immigration services, and to improve labour market outcomes for newcomers.
 - Assisting economic and social integration through improved language, and accreditation supports, strengthening newcomer employability (i.e. the Region's Internationally Educated Professionals Conference), promotion of inclusive workplaces, addressing information needs, increasing local service planning, and strengthening social cohesion.
- The Local Immigration Partnership, through the Community Partnership Council, has developed the 2017 – 2021 Newcomer Strategy that focuses

on Economic and Social Integration for newcomers. A key action includes a pilot to strengthen employability for newcomers.

2. What do you think are the main reasons people struggle to make ends meet in York Region?

There are a number of reasons that people may struggle to make ends meet in York Region. From a Community and Health Services perspective, the main reasons poverty persists in our municipalities may be attributed to:

- The lack of a multifaceted approach that complements the interconnectedness of social determinants of health, i.e., housing and homelessness, employment and training, education, etc. Evidence has shown that people with low income fare poorly in the social determinants of health and, as a result, face a lifetime of poor health. However, these negative health outcomes can be mitigated and avoided by investing in poverty reduction.
- Hard working, low and moderate income residents (households earning \$78,000 or less annually) are challenged by the growing gap between household income and the high cost of living, specifically the expensive housing market in York Region.
- High mortgage debt and increasing costs of living is putting low and moderate income households at financial risk. Housing affordability is an increasing concern for residents in the Region, with their wealth increasingly tied up in their homes. In 2016, the average household in York Region had \$420,071 in mortgage debt. Consumer debt, which includes credit cards, car loans and lines of credit, accounted for another 13 per cent and averaged \$62,283 per household in 2016.
- The lack of sustainable social infrastructure for affordable housing and seniors facilities, early learning and child care, and cultural or recreational infrastructure.
- The need for sustainable growth planning with more accessible services in urban/rural areas such as improved transportation networks to access a variety of services (i.e. health care services, education, etc.)
- Between 2011 and 2015, 56% of York Region's population growth was due to immigration. However, the unemployment rate of newcomers is about twice as high as the general population. (StatsCan Labour Force Survey 2006 – 2016) Low-income rates are almost three times as high. (StatsCan Census data 2001, 2006 and NHS 2011). Reasons for under and unemployment varies, but includes:
 - Language skills lacking to practice their profession
 - Accreditation of previous education may not be recognized
 - Discrimination
 - Learning new systems, finding adequate housing and childcare can make it more difficult to obtain suitable employment.

3. Which groups in York Region do you think need the most urgent help?

Poverty reduction efforts in York Region are in critical need for:

- Low income residents (e.g., unemployed, underemployed, etc.), including working age adults which account for 15% of the population in York Region, as well as children (15.1%);
- Seniors who make up 21,070 of low income residents in York Region, representing a total low income rate of 14.6% for seniors.
- People experiencing homelessness, especially those experiencing chronic homelessness (over 1,100 York Region residents experienced homelessness in 2015).
- People living with disabilities (e.g., physical, intellectual/developmental, learning, mental illness, and addictions/substance use);
- People experiencing intimate partner violence (so they can gain financial independence to leave unstable relationships);
- Indigenous people;
- Ethno-racial communities (e.g., racial/racialized or cultural minorities, immigrants and refugees, etc.).

4. How can existing government programs be improved to reduce poverty in York Region?

Housing

- The rising costs of home ownership and low supply of affordable rental units continue to contribute to the rising demand for the Region's subsidized housing units. There continues to be a growing need more for housing supply in the Region.
- More flexibility and continuity of funding for affordable housing to support capital repairs for existing social housing, new supply of affordable housing, rent subsidies, and home renovations for low to moderate income households.
 - Additionally, improve social housing program rules that are poorly integrated with other income support programs so that lower income residents can improve their circumstances.
- Eliminate indemnification restrictions in the Canada-Ontario Social Housing Agreement to allow social housing providers to leverage funding for renovation and redevelopment.
- One community result area under the Human Services Planning Board of York Region is to create housing options that are affordable for everyone in its community. More housing options will help make the Region more attractive to all demographics including the younger skilled workers needed to replace retirees. When housing costs are more affordable and families have more disposable income, local businesses gain from the increased buying power made possible by the availability of different types of housing (i.e. rental and ownership).

Income-Related Benefits

- As a non-taxable benefit that increases as income rises, the Canada Child Benefit effectively increases income. The decision by the Government of Ontario not to claw back funds from Ontario Works (OW) recipients ensures that families with the lowest incomes receive the full benefit. The federal government should encourage all provinces to agree to similar coordination for future income support programs.
- Employment Insurance (EI) – OW issues full assistance until an EI claim is finalized. The EI and OW offices may pay benefits during the same time period. Ontario law states you must pay back any social assistance (OW) that covers the same period as your EI benefits. EI services need to improve their service delivery model to provide better access, streamline services and link to provincial government programs.
- With the decline of manufacturing secure jobs, and growth in higher-pay knowledge sector jobs and lower-pay service sector jobs, there has been a hollowing out of middle-level jobs in the goods and services sector, and resulting in increased job precarity. Key policy areas to respond to these changes include improving federal child benefits and access to Employment Insurance for people entering or re-entering the labour force. As well as continued workforce development, by exploring community benefits agreements, and encouraging development strategies to target the range of age groups within the working poor.
- York Region's Senior's Strategy focuses on four focus areas that would help seniors, including:
 - Balancing the needs of seniors with all residents through increased income supports, dental benefits, and a holistic approach to healthcare;
 - Keeping seniors healthier through expanded government funding for prevention programs including community paramedicine, long-term care facilities/beds, homecare, respite care, and adult day programs;
 - Support for age-friendly, complete communities through expanded government funding for infrastructure for a variety of housing options, including rental, affordable retirement homes, secondary suites and congregate living options; and
 - Connecting seniors and caregivers to the right programs and services at the right times by improving coordination and integrated service delivery to assist seniors with system navigation.

Partnering

There are a number of opportunities for the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government to establish stronger partnerships on current initiatives to address poverty together, such as:

- Obtaining federal support for Ontario's *Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy* that aims to increase the supply of affordable housing and end homelessness by 2025.

- Developing long-term, sustainable funding programs to allow Service Managers to do long-term planning to meet their Housing and Homelessness Plan commitments.
- Ensuring that federal objectives and mandates connect seamlessly with provincial, territorial, and local strategies and approaches.
- Supporting coordinated actions across the human services sector (including health and mental health, income assistance, affordable housing, child care, education and training).
- Continuing to prioritize federal investment in social infrastructure, particularly affordable housing.
- Partnering with municipal governments/programs to support subsidy for children to participate in social and physical activities.
- Supporting income security strategies by promoting progressive employment (precarious employment, 'working poor'), improving employment standards, providing more comprehensive social assistance, or expanding the Basic Income Guarantee as a national initiative.
- Providing sustainable funding for local initiatives and pathways to address mental health issues. Depending on the region/municipality, access to service is not equal and referral options are often limited.
- Exploring opportunities for partnerships that focus on addressing under-employment and job precarity in the community. These could include advocacy on re-designing federal and provincial supports that help workers better manage the risk of job precarity, and support for progressive employment opportunities.
- Continued support for the Local Immigration Partnership, to drive local solutions and work with community partners to address poverty and economic integration in newcomer communities. This includes partnerships that help newcomers find employment that reflects their skills and education, such as the Internationally Educated Professional conference that also intends to help employers to understand the value of a diverse workforce.
- The federal and provincial governments are working towards reestablishing the Canada Ontario Immigration Agreement that previously established the Municipal Immigration Committee as a valuable forum to ensure adequate planning and supports for immigrant settlement and integration.
- Supporting efforts for a national seniors strategy, which includes: improved access for seniors and their caregivers to services and supports; acknowledging equity and sociocultural differences; providing seniors and their families with the best information to make informed choices; making the best use of resources when planning and delivering services; and providing better quality of care.

Data improvements

- There are also a number of potential improvements to the availability and collection of poverty-related data that may help to address knowledge gaps. These include:
 - Clarifying the existing poverty measure.

- Tracking household income, including the number of children per household.
- Improved data collection on homelessness to mitigate existing data gaps.
- Considering the characteristics of geographic location that influence the experience of poverty in data collection.
- Provide support for Public Health Ontario which requires additional support in data sharing to update the Ontario Marginalization (ON-Marg) index with current data. The ON-Marg index helps to explore how factors like residential instability and material deprivation are concentrated at local level and how this is affecting health outcomes.
- Use of the Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool (Urban HEART) to assess urban equity in relation to 1) Physical Environment & Infrastructure; 2) Social & Human Development; 3) Economic Opportunity; 4) Governance; and 5) General Population Health.
- Use of the Early Development Instrument to measure a child's ability to meet age appropriate developmental expectations.
- Use consistent methodology for data gathering and evaluation so data is reliable and can be compared over time and across geographies.
- The need for more predictive analytics for human services planning to meet future growth and service needs.
- Any proposed indicators/measurements should be stratified with the social determinants of health to highlight inequities. These include: 1) Stress, Bodies, and Illness; 2) Income and Income Distribution; 3) Education; 4) Unemployment and Job Security; 5) Employment and Working Conditions; 6) Early Childhood Development; 7) Food Insecurity; 8) Housing; 9) Social Exclusion; 10) Social Safety Net; 11) Health Services; 12) Aboriginal Status; 13) Gender; 14) Race; and 15) Disability.

Choosing indicators for tracking groups

Consider indicators to track progress including income, employment, health care usage, housing education, the percent of residents dependent on financial benefits and the percent of residents returning to OW.

5. What are some key services or types of programs that are missing in York Region that would really make a difference?

- Create Federal tax incentives aimed at removing barriers to new affordable and market-rental housing and incentivizing new rental housing construction.
- Create investment vehicles for long-term and social impact investors to help finance affordable housing or rental housing developments.
- Development of an Early Learning and Child Care Framework; evidence suggests that effective children's services policies boost employment,

reduce gender inequality and promote child development, particularly for struggling families.

- Provide access to oral health care for all Canadians. For example, the Government of Canada could align with the provinces by imbedding dental treatment into publicly funded health care (i.e. OHIP in Ontario).
- Develop a coordinated approach between health promotion/prevention initiatives and health care services.
- Strengthening social assistance systems financially and to become more client focused.
- Access to adequate nutrition.
- Improved settlement services for newcomers built around the model of service integration, including employment supports, language training, and accreditation.
- Support for local planning that addresses community needs by bringing together diverse stakeholders to increase capacity. The Local Immigration Partnership, through its Community Partnership Council, which represents various sectors (police, education, settlement, health, social services etc.), provides the model to do this. This approach to collaborative planning would be beneficial in other areas, but resources and supports are needed to do this.
- As York Region's role as a service system manager increases, the federal government should consider funding allocation based on evidence and established need within the communities that are being served.
- To address homelessness and York Region's residents at risk of becoming homeless, increased funding and supports for the Region's Housing Stability Program are needed to keep pace with demand.

Data improvements

- Exploring gaps in employment measurements such as determining what work is voluntarily or involuntarily precarious.
- Expanding data collection to focus on populations that are hard to reach and remunerate to allow a fuller picture of populations in need.

Reporting progress

- Provide regular progress reports on federal activity to address poverty, as well as flexibility to modify or adjust the proposed plan.
- Any plan put forward should include input from Canadians, especially vulnerable population groups and those with lived experience, as well as incorporate accountability measures and ensure sustainability.
- Provide a forum for ongoing engagement with stakeholders. For example, through a legislative committee on Poverty Reduction Strategy, the federal government can communicate regularly with all stakeholders through annual program reports, e-newsletters, annual conferences and webinars.
- Use social media platforms to reach a larger audience.