

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Community and Health Services
December 3, 2020

Report of the Commissioner of Community and Health Services and Medical Officer of Health

Public Health Benefits of Complete Communities

1. Recommendations

1. The findings of this report be considered as part of the Municipal Comprehensive Review to support the Region's Official Plan policy direction to create complete communities.
2. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the nine local municipalities to support ongoing municipal planning for complete communities.
3. The Regional Clerk circulate this report for information to the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, York Region Members of Parliament, York Region Members of Provincial Parliament, York Region District School Board, the York Region Catholic School Board, Conseil Scolaire Viamonde, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority.

2. Summary

The way our communities are planned and designed influences health-related outcomes. Chronic illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes have become leading health threats. We are faced with the challenge of chronic diseases, which require the planning and design of complete and resilient communities. Restrictions introduced to help control COVID-19 have also highlighted how inclusive and complete communities are important for increasing access to public green spaces to support physical and mental health and social well-being. Access to the many parks, open spaces and trail connections developed by local municipal partners has been an important contributor to resident health during the pandemic. Complete, compact communities offer a mix of land uses, amenities and services that support healthy behaviours and lives by integrating physical activity into daily life through walking or cycling.

Complete communities also provide convenient alternatives to motor vehicle transportation and related traffic related air pollution. There is strong evidence that air pollution can increase the incidence of and severity of many chronic diseases. In addition, urban tree cover and green space can help to decrease the health impacts of extreme heat, especially for people with chronic diseases.

Through the Municipal Comprehensive Review, updated Official Plan policies will continue to emphasize the value of Complete Communities. This report uses data to demonstrate this value from a public health perspective as complete communities promote active lifestyles in that they are walkable, provide access to transit and offer a range of community amenities, services and housing options at the neighbourhood level.

Key Points:

- Chronic diseases are the leading causes of premature illness and death among York Region adult residents
- Complete communities can reduce chronic diseases by creating conditions and opportunities that support people to increase their physical activity in carrying out daily activities by walking, cycling and using public transit. Extensive research on the health benefits associated with community design shows denser, walkable neighbourhoods with services and amenities nearby allow people to more easily incorporate physical activity into their daily activities
- As a collaborative partner, Public Health is working with regional and municipal planning and transportation partners to create mixed-use walkable neighbourhoods that can reduce the incidence of deaths from chronic diseases in York Region attributable to physical inactivity
- Council and the Region's city building initiatives are committed to the development of complete communities as can be seen through recent growth in the Region's Centres and Corridors which are examples of complete, active, mixed use communities
- Through the Regional Official Plan update, policies supporting the development of complete communities will be maintained and, where appropriate, enhanced

3. Background

Both the Ontario Ministry of Health (the Ministry) and the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada have recognized that stronger multi-sectoral collaboration between municipal and regional planning, engineering and public health authorities are important to improve the health and well-being of Canadians. For this reason, the Ministry mandated public health units to promote healthier built environments to improve health under the Ontario Public Health Standards. The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada released her report, [State of Public Health in Canada 2017 - Designing Healthy Living](#) to summarize the importance of this collaboration.

Creating complete communities contributes to achieving healthier outcomes

York Region's ongoing commitment to planning for complete communities positively influences health. Regional Centres and Corridors are integral to building complete communities. These areas, including Markham Centre, Newmarket Centre, Richmond Hill/Langstaff Gateway and the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre, are evolving into highly active

urban places, although Markham Centre and Vaughan Centre are further advanced in their planning. Both Markham Centre and Vaughan Centre have exceeded their 2031 population targets and have commenced work to update their Secondary Plans. Regional Centres and Corridors are supported by rapid transit service, supporting communities with more compact developments offering a mix of housing, employment, retail and institutional destinations and amenities. The majority of high-rise construction in the Region is in the Centres and Corridors and in 2019; financial incentive programs were introduced to encourage purpose built rental and large office buildings. Planning complete communities is underway across York Region through new community areas, including Secondary Plan and Block Plan developments. Public Health continues to support the Region's [Vision 2051](#) and the [York Region Official Plan 2010](#) planning objective to create mixed use, transit-supportive complete communities that support people to more easily meet physical activity guidelines and reduce the incidence of many chronic diseases.

Complete communities build physical activity into daily life

By meeting [The Canadian Physical Activities Guidelines](#) recommendation for adults age 18 and over to accumulate at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity per week, the risk for the onset of and death from many diseases and conditions can be reduced. Complete communities support opportunities for residents to be physically active while carrying out many daily activities by locating destinations (employment, education, shops, services, social visits, etc.) that are within a comfortable walking or cycling distance of their homes. Public transit provides additional opportunities for residents to be active and encourages walking and cycling as a means to access transit.

4. Analysis

Half of York Region's population do not meet the physical activity guidelines that can provide important health benefits

The 2017 the Canadian Community Health Survey found that only 49% of respondents in York Region age 18 and older reported that they met the recommended physical activity targets. The Canadian Community Health Survey uses self-reported data.

Cancer, heart disease and diabetes are the leading chronic diseases in York Region

Chronic diseases are the main cause of illness and death in York Region among adults age 18 and over. Cancers account for 31% of the 5,063 annual total deaths among York Region adults. Deaths from cancers are followed by those caused by diseases of the circulatory system (27%), by mental and behavioural disorders (9%), and by respiratory system diseases (8%).

Physical activity reduces the risk of diseases and cancer

Physical inactivity contributes to the incidence of many chronic diseases in York Region such as diabetes, hypertension and coronary heart disease. There were 6,444 new cases of

diabetes diagnosed in York Region in 2017. Of those cases, it is estimated that 26.5% were due to residents not being physically active. Achieving physical activity targets could reduce the number of new cases of diabetes by approximately 1,700 cases per year.

In addition, 6,032 new cases of coronary artery disease were diagnosed in York Region in 2017. Approximately 1,000 cases (17.3%) of coronary artery disease per year could potentially be avoided by meeting the physical activity targets. The incidence of additional diseases including stroke and cancers of the colon and breast are also attributed to physical inactivity (Table 1).

Table 1
Chronic diseases in York Region linked to physical inactivity, 2017*

Disease	Annual Number of people with new diagnoses	Percentage of new cases associated with physical inactivity	Annual Number of new people with chronic diseases due to physical inactivity
Diabetes	6,444	26.5%	1708
Coronary Artery Disease	6,032	17.3%	1044
Stroke	218	16.3%	36
Hypertension	10,001	14.9%	1491
Colon Cancer	430	15.3%	66
Breast Cancer	789	9.3%	74

* Most current available data retrieved from: Statistics Canada. Canadian Community Health Survey. Ottawa (ON): Statistics Canada, Ontario Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care; 2018.

Increased physical activity in York Region will reduce individual and societal economic impacts

Not only do chronic diseases impose great personal burdens but they also result in large economic impacts on individuals and the health care system. A [2019 Public Health Ontario report](#) estimated that in Canada the average per capita healthcare cost attributed to physical inactivity was \$69 for direct costs (e.g. costs for medical care, hospitalization, diagnostic tests, medications) and \$115 for indirect costs (e.g. lost time from work, loss of income or employment, costs related to care borne by family). In 2019, the direct health care cost linked to physical inactivity for Ontario was an estimated \$0.98 billion a year and the indirect costs were \$1.65 billion per year.

The cost of diabetes, a common condition in York Region, provides an example of local impact. Each year, an estimated 1,708 new cases of diabetes occur in York Region attributable to physical inactivity. This number of new cases would add an additional \$41 million of lifetime care costs to the healthcare system*. A more active population can reduce the annual number of cases of diabetes and their associated lifetime costs. Continuing to plan for complete communities promotes physical activity and reduces the health and economic burden associated with not only diabetes but also other chronic diseases.

* Note: Lifetime costs were documented in a 2013 US study and they were applied to the annual number of new cases of diabetes in 2017 in York Region. The cost of care for diabetes in the US was adjusted to account for the lower cost of care in Ontario.

Health is one of the key drivers for strengthening complete communities and where appropriate enhancing ROP policies and partnerships to deliver complete communities

The [Built Environment & Health Action Plan](#) developed by Public Health with its Regional partners guides how York Region departments can work together with municipalities and other key partners to address how the built environment can improve health.

Public Health has since strengthened partnerships with regional and municipal partners through the provision of health data and information, technical advice on planning and transportation infrastructure development projects, and by providing assistance in land use policy and development review processes.

Public Health is also partnering with local municipalities and other stakeholders to promote walkable, complete communities. This will strengthen how health is integrated into planning and infrastructure development to help advance the creation of complete communities which can influence people to adopt more active lifestyles. The findings of this report confirm the need to maintain and if necessary enhance policies supporting Complete Communities and a healthy built environment through the Regional Official Plan update. Preliminary policy directions in this regard are included within the December 2020, Regional Official Plan Update Policy Directions Report.

5. Financial

There are no financial or budget implications associated with this report.

Public Health activities, programs and services will be managed within the 2020 Council approved budget of \$75 million gross, and \$17.7 million net, excluding extraordinary costs related to COVID-19. Investments in infrastructure including sidewalks, cycling infrastructure and transit projects, particularly in urban centres and corridors and key intensification areas are supported by the health benefits associated with complete communities.

6. Local Impact

Local municipalities are developing complete communities and have contributed to the health of York Region's residents through local planning initiatives, and infrastructure to improve walkability

Public Health will continue to work with Regional and local municipal partners to advance the development of complete communities and sustain lasting health outcomes already underway for the development of complete communities to sustain lasting health outcomes. Work by staff with local municipalities includes participation on technical advisory committees, working groups and providing research and data for planning and transportation projects.

Public Health will continue to collaborate with our community partners including municipalities, school boards and other local organizations to communicate the health benefits of complete communities

Public Health will continue to be actively engaged with Regional departments, local municipalities, school boards and other community partners on planning initiatives and projects to shift behaviour towards more active lifestyles and raise awareness about the health benefits of complete communities.

7. Conclusion

Public Health is continuing to support Regional Council by collaborating with Regional and municipal planning partners to develop complete communities and healthy built environment policies and guidelines. Complete communities will help to achieve a healthier York Region.

For more information on this report, please contact Dr. Richard Gould, Associate Medical Officer of Health at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 76401. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by:

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