

New funding will help Peel address healthcare among unhoused

By **ZACHARY ROMAN**

Province administering grant from ?Building Faster Fund?

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Amid an affordable housing crisis, the Region of Peel has received funding to improve health care for those experiencing homelessness.

In a March 15 statement, the Region announced it had received \$1.7 million from Ontario Health to improve access to health support for Peel residents experiencing homelessness.

Ontario Health is the crown agency that oversees the administration of health care in the province.

The \$1.7 million will go through WellFort Community Health Services, a community health centre based in Brampton.

The money will support work being done at Peel's Dundas shelter, which the Region describes as a medical shelter. There, it says residents can receive ?high-quality, trauma-informed, patient-centered primary care.?

From June 2022 to December 2023, 428 people received care for complex health needs and/or COVID-19 at the shelter.

?Recognizing that people living precariously are also likely to face complex health challenges, Peel Region has launched an innovative health care model to address housing and health needs?? reads the release. ?This model has not only proven successful in improving clients' health outcomes and removing barriers to access, but it has also saved costs for the health care system.?

According to the Region, the funding from Ontario Health will support health operations at the Dundas shelter and allow Peel to enhance and expand health services for homeless people across the region.

Regional staff said Peel is experiencing an unprecedented affordable housing crisis, with more people than ever struggling to make ends meet and have a roof over their heads.

The Region estimates 91,000 of its residents are in core housing need.

According to Statistics Canada, people in core housing need ?live in an unsuitable, inadequate or unaffordable dwelling and cannot afford alternative housing in their community.?

Region of Peel Council Chair Nando Iannicca said as a service provider, Peel has shown leadership with the way it provides health care for those experiencing homelessness ? especially in the face of an affordable housing crisis.

?(Peel's) holistic approach has shown tremendous promise to housing and health outcomes for some of the most vulnerable residents,? said Iannicca. ?This model would not be possible without the generous support of the provincial government. I'm encouraged by today's \$1.7 million funding announcement that will not only help residents get and keep housing but will also help residents live engaged and healthy lives.?

In a joint statement, Peel's Commissioner of Human Services, Sean Baird, and Commissioner of Health Services Nancy Polsinelli,

said the link between housing and health is clear.

?Residents unable to secure sustainable housing are more likely to face health challenges and require integrated models of care to improve individual health,? they said. ?We're pleased to see the government of Ontario recognize this innovative and important work in Peel and contribute to its sustainability with a \$1.7 million investment. We look forward to further expanding this model of care with our partners to address this growing community need.?