

New report says investing in community services is best way to increase public safety

Report commissioned by Peel's Anti-Black Racism and Systemic Discrimination Collective

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A recently-released report states investing in community services is the most cost-effective way of increasing community safety.

The report was authored by research firm Blueprint ADE and commissioned by Peel's Anti-Black Racism & Systemic Discrimination Collective (ABR-SD).

Research for the report was undertaken between February and August of 2023. Blueprint ADE was tasked with researching community safety in Peel, analyzing how current safety systems in Peel work, and developing a roadmap and options for enhancing safety in Peel with an emphasis on community perspectives and ideas that have been less commonly heard or considered.

The report's executive summary highlights some of Blueprint ADE's key findings.

In the area of mental health crisis response, Blueprint ADE said Peel Regional Police (PRP) officer responses are perceived by community agencies as having mixed success.

“Data from other jurisdictions shows that non-police responses have promising results in de-escalating incidents without harm, connecting individuals to services, and achieving cost savings and efficiencies,” reads the report. “There is an opportunity to scale the Peel non-police response model and assess its impact.”

When it comes to the safety of individuals experiencing homelessness, the report said housing and mental health services, including those specifically designed for people who are in the justice system, are “more effective at supporting life stabilization and recovery than police or justice system involvement.”

When it comes to the safety of youth, the report said Peel has an opportunity to “enhance accessible, affordable, culturally specific, and peer-based mental health supports for young people in Peel.”

It also said Peel can “expand the use of diversion programs to minimize the harm and long-term impact of justice system involvement.”

The report, which is 94 pages in its entirety, outlines some ways Peel can enhance community safety.

In the short term, the report states Peel can invest in non-police community crisis response, enhance support for existing community services making a proven difference in Peel, and work with Peel Regional Police to find funding for agencies that attend the Peel Situation Table.

In the medium term, the report states Peel can work with Peel Regional Police to improve and expand community crisis response based on data collected, shift the Peel Situation Table from being police-led to municipally-led, and work with other levels of government to fill gaps in social services.

In the long term, the report states Peel can shift its 911 call centre to be municipally-led and assess the feasibility of creating a community-based organization to house a community crisis response program, lead the Peel Situation Table, and work with

municipal staff to make sure 911 call centre staff are well-trained.

Angela Carter, a member of the ABR-SD collective, said in a statement that Peel needs a system that sends the right people to a given crisis.

“Good programs are up and running here and there, but we need a coherent plan for providing the right kind of crisis support to people who are in vulnerable situations,” said Carter.

The ABR-SD's news release states that “Peel Region can significantly improve community safety, at a far lower cost, by investing in community services and taking a more diversified approach to funding community safety.”