

Peel Public Health remains underfunded: Regional staff

Public health unit to get one per cent funding increase per year over next three years

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Region of Peel staff say more funding is needed for public health.

On October 26, a report from Nancy Polsinelli, Peel's Commissioner of Health Services, and Peel's Acting Medical Officer of Health, Kate Bingham, was brought to Region of Peel Council.

The report states the Province has said Peel Public Health will receive a one per cent funding increase, equal to \$500,000 per year, for the next three years.

While the increase is welcome, said Polsinelli and Bingham's report, the impact of it is minimal.

It said the increase does not account for inflation, Peel's population growth, or Peel's ongoing public health funding shortfall.

Polsinelli and Bingham's report said Peel receives lower per-capita funding than most other public health units in Ontario.

“Underfunding impacts Peel's ability to meet community needs and provide timely access to services,” said Polsinelli and Bingham in their report. “Ongoing support from Regional Council and advocacy to the Province for sufficient funding are therefore required.”

Regional staff estimate Peel Public Health will have a \$9.5 million funding shortfall by the end of 2023. Staff say in 2022, for cost-shared public health programs, Peel Public Health was funded by the Province at about \$34 per capita while Toronto and Hamilton were funded at \$49 per capita.

Polsinelli and Bingham's report notes the Province has not committed to providing any COVID-19 funding past 2023, which is creating uncertainty.

The report also gives some examples of how Peel's public health system is strained.

From 2018 to 2021, there was a 67 per cent increase in opioid toxicity deaths in Peel. From 2018 to 2022, 682 people died from toxic drugs in the Region.

Regional staff say only two harm-reduction mobile vans and one planned supervised consumption site exist to serve the entirety of Peel, which is not enough to address the opioid crisis.

From 2017 to 2022, there was a 12 per cent increase in the number of food premise inspections needed in Peel, as well as a four per cent increase in recreational water facility inspections needed.

Regional staff said in 2022, about 8,500 public health inspections weren't able to be completed due to insufficient resources. Staff said available resources were prioritized for high-risk premises and ensuring at least one inspection per year was done for most premises.