

Region asks Province for help supporting vulnerable residents

Peel says Ontario Works recipients are in a growing state of crisis

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The Region of Peel is asking the Provincial Government to support Ontario Works recipients.

In a November 4 news release, the Region said there's a growing crisis among Ontario Works recipients as social assistance rates have not risen with the cost of living.

According to the Province, Ontario Works provides financial assistance for food and housing expenses. It also offers health benefits and employment supports to help people find and keep a job, such as resume-writing workshops, job counseling, job-specific training and basic education.

In most cases, people must participate in employment-related activities in order to receive financial help. Ontario Works recipients can get up to \$733 per month for basic needs and shelter if they are single, and potentially more for benefits or if they have immediate family members to support.

At a recent Region of Peel Council meeting, a report titled "The Erosion of Basic Living Standards for Peel's Most Vulnerable Residents" was presented to lawmakers.

Authored by Region of Peel staff, the report detailed how social assistance rates have remained stagnant compared to the cost of living.

"The report highlights the impact of Ontario's stagnant social assistance rates, which have not risen since 2018," reads the news release. "To keep up with inflation, Ontario Works rates would need to increase by over \$150 per month beyond the current \$733 for single individuals. As a result, recipients are forced to endure hardship and insecurity, often unable to meet essential needs like housing, food, and healthcare."

Peel has seen a 41 per cent increase in Ontario Works cases in the past year and there are 32,000 individuals or families waiting for affordable housing in the region.

The staff report states that it is imperative Ontario Works rates be indexed to inflation and that benefits must also be raised to reflect the true cost of living.

The report also says as the cost of rent far exceeds the amount of support provided, vulnerable Peel residents are increasingly unable to secure safe and affordable housing.

Other advocacy priorities for the Region include addressing food insecurity "which 20 per cent of Peel households face" and improving access to mental health supports.

"Peel Region's advocacy efforts, in collaboration with community partners, aim to secure the necessary provincial support to address these issues and prevent further hardship for its residents," reads the news release.

Steve Jacques, Peel's Commissioner of Human Services, added: "We are calling on the provincial government to raise Ontario Works rates to a livable standard and index them to inflation. This is not just about poverty alleviation "it's about restoring dignity

and stability to our residents.?