

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

2025 Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness

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YORK REGION

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1.0 Introduction

The Regional Municipality of York is committed to fostering welcoming and inclusive communities where people have access to the services they need. To provide supports for people experiencing homelessness, York Region partners with service providers to deliver programs, supports and services using a person-centered, equitable and collaborative approach.

1.1 Purpose of the Strategy

York Region's Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness provides information on how people can access supports and services during the hot weather season.

The 2025 Heat Relief Strategy is in effect from June 1 to September 30, 2025, although there may be occasions where periods of extreme heat fall outside of this date range. The strategy includes:

- Advising partners and members of the public that extreme hot weather conditions and/or high humidity are expected or currently exist
- Providing information about additional supports and services available for people experiencing homelessness during the hot weather season
- Distributing heat safety and cooling supplies to help reduce the effects of extreme heat for people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered
- Collaborating with service providers to expand access to supports
- Opening emergency housing overflow beds during extreme weather events, where possible

1.2 Extreme Heat and Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately vulnerable to adverse health effects of extreme heat compared to the general population. This increased risk is due to a combination of factors, including:

- Increased time spent outdoors
- Limited or no access to protective measures and heat safety and cooling supplies, such as sunscreen and shade
- Reliance on active travel, such as walking long distances outdoors
- Inadequate access to water
- Malnourishment
- Pre-existing conditions, such as physical or mental illness or substance use
- Clustering in urban cores, which can result in exposure to higher temperatures

Extreme heat is of particular concern for people experiencing homelessness, especially individuals who do not have access to shelter or cool spaces, because the effects of heat exposure are cumulative. The risk of illness due to heat exposure grows with each successive day without cooling. Warm overnight temperatures may worsen health effects due to limited recovery time from daytime heat.

While the impact of extreme heat can be deadly, there are ways to prevent and reduce negative health outcomes during extreme heat, such as warning the public of extreme heat, distribution of educational materials, distribution of heat safety and cooling supplies (such as water, hats and sunscreen), and

access to cool, indoor spaces. For more information on the effects of extreme heat, including symptoms and treatment for heat exhaustion and heat stroke, visit york.ca/ExtremeHeat

1.3 Temperature Thresholds for Extreme Heat

Extreme heat is defined as a period of very high temperatures, typically accompanied by high humidity and lack of nighttime cooling.

In 2016, Public Health Units across Ontario collaborated with the federal and provincial governments to develop and broadly implement a province-wide [Heat Warning Information System \(HWIS\)](#). The HWIS provides a consistent, evidence-based approach to notify the public of heat warnings in Ontario. Heat warning criteria were developed based on the relationship between mortality, air temperature and/or humidex, along with other key factors such as air pollution, climate and population characteristics.

Heat Warnings, Special Weather Alerts/Statements and Extended Heat Warnings are issued within York Region based on the criteria below.

Level	Criteria	Duration
Special Weather Statement	First heat event of the season up until the Canada Day weekend, at the discretion of Environment and Climate Change Canada, when heat warning criteria is not reached	No defined duration
Special Weather Alert	Discretionary alert issued by York Region Homelessness Community Programs when extreme weather events have the potential to put people experiencing homelessness at greater risk. Examples include but are not limited to severe heatwaves, drought, wildfires, wildfire smoke or smog (Air Quality Advisory is 10 or higher), thunderstorms, earthquakes, flooding, and other conditions.	No defined duration
Heat Warning	Temperatures are expected to be 31°C or higher <i>and</i> overnight temperatures are expected to be 20°C or higher <i>or</i> Humidex is at least 40	Two days
Extended Heat Warning	Temperatures are expected to be 31°C or higher <i>and</i> overnight temperatures are expected to be 20°C or higher <i>or</i> Humidex is at least 40	Three or more days

Similar to a Heat Warning, when a Special Weather Alert is issued, emergency housing overflow beds will be activated when service providers have availability and capacity.

Based on the above criteria, York Region Public Health provides communications to partners and the public through email, social media and news stories. Many neighbouring Public Health Units use the same thresholds as York Region Public Health, including Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, City of Toronto, Peel Region, Durham Region and City of Hamilton.

1.4 Air Quality

People experiencing homelessness are vulnerable to exposure to poor air quality. Exposure symptoms can range from milder symptoms like headaches, nose and throat irritation, to more serious symptoms like shortness of breath, wheezing, severe cough, dizziness or chest pain.

York Region Public Health monitors Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) and Air Quality Alerts from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks. The AQHI is a tool to help people understand how air quality can affect health. The AQHI provides real-time measurement of air pollution levels and recommendations on how people can limit their exposure and adjust their activity level during times of high air pollution.

During wildfire smoke events, York Region Public Health may issue a Special Weather Alert to the public and partners and work with emergency housing service providers to open overflow beds, when possible, if an Air Quality Advisory of 10 or higher is issued by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. York Region Outreach Services will distribute masks to people living unsheltered to help protect them against the harmful effects of wildfire smoke. For more information, visit york.ca/OutdoorAirQuality

2.0 Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness

2.1 Updates to the 2025 Heat Relief Strategy

York Region is implementing several initiatives through the 2024 to 2027 [Homelessness Service System Plan](#) and the accompanying [rapid deployment actions](#). This includes prevention and diversion efforts to keep people housed, and housing stability supports to help ensure the safety and shelter needs of people experiencing homelessness are met.

The Region has taken the following actions to expand system capacity:

Homelessness Prevention, Diversion and Intervention Services

- Expanding York Region Outreach Services' capacity to serve people experiencing homelessness and implementing new service hours (Monday to Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. and weekends from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.)
- Continuing allocation of funding for rent assistance programs to accelerate the transition of people staying in emergency housing to longer-term housing in the broader community

Emergency Housing and Seasonal Shelters

- Adding new emergency housing beds through rapid deployment actions
- Improving intake process to create stability and ease of access to beds
- Increasing emergency housing overflow capacity at hotel locations
- Extending two seasonal shelter programs to operate from June to October

Drop-in Programs

- Expanding hours of operation at the Newmarket drop-in program
- Opening a new drop-in program in Georgina available seven days a week

2.2 Issuing Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings

The following steps are taken when Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings are issued for York Region:

1. Notifications are sent to York Region Public Health when a Heat Warning is issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada
2. York Region Public Health notifies partners by sending an email to their distribution list
 - Internal partners receiving notifications include:
 - Access York
 - Community Paramedicine
 - Social Services
 - Strategic Department Communications and Engagement
 - Transit Enforcement
 - External partners receiving notifications include:
 - Food security programs
 - Local municipalities
 - Organizations providing mental health and addiction services
 - Other organizations providing services to people experiencing homelessness
 - York Region Emergency Housing Central Intake Line
 - York Region emergency and transitional housing service providers
 - York Region funded drop-in programs
 - York Regional Police
3. The email notification advises that the **Heat Warning** will be in place for two days. The email also indicates that if extreme heat persists, an Extended Heat Warning may be issued by York Region Public Health
4. Through Strategic Department Communications and Engagement, York Region Public Health issues social media posts and news stories to advise the public of the extreme heat conditions
5. Information on how to keep safe during extreme heat can be found on york.ca/ExtremeHeat
6. York Region Public Health may issue an **Extended Heat Warning** notification when a Heat Warning extends beyond two days
7. York Region Public Health notifies their distribution list once Extended Heat Warnings have ended

To be added to the distribution list to receive Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings, send an email to: HCPWeatherAlerts@york.ca

2.3 Distribution of Heat Safety and Cooling Supplies

York Region Outreach Services distributes heat safety and cooling supplies to people experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered in collaboration with Community Paramedicine and Transit Enforcement. Heat safety and cooling supplies including water, sunscreen, instant ice packs, insect repellent, sun hats and sunglasses to help mitigate the effects of extreme heat on people experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered.

2.4 Emergency Housing Central Intake Line

Anyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness in York Region who is seeking shelter can contact the Emergency Housing Central Intake Line (EHCIL) 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling **1-877-464-9675 ext. 76140**. The EHCIL refers people experiencing homelessness to available emergency housing spaces and provides referrals to other resources as appropriate.

The EHCIL will provide people experiencing homelessness with additional supports during Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings, as appropriate, which may include transportation and gift cards to accessible air-conditioned locations to purchase food and cold beverages.

2.5 Emergency Housing and Seasonal Shelters

Emergency and transitional housing, domestic, family and gender-based violence shelters, and drop-in programs provide a range of services to help people experiencing homelessness to find housing and access supports.

During the hot weather season, the risks related to extreme heat are greatest during daytime hours. During daytime hours, air-conditioned facilities are open to the public and drop-in programs are available for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The table below shows emergency housing and seasonal shelter capacity for the 2024-2025 Heat Relief season. More information about emergency housing and seasonal shelters in York Region can be found at york.ca/EmergencyHousing

Program	Service Provider	Location	Eligibility
<u>Belinda's Place</u>	Salvation Army	16580 Yonge Street, Newmarket	Adult women (Ages 16+)
<u>Connections</u>	360°kids	10415 Yonge Street, Richmond Hill	Youth (Ages 16 to 26)
<u>Hotel Overflow for Adults</u>	Blue Door	Vaughan	Adults (Ages 16+)
<u>Hotel Overflow for Families with Children</u>	Blue Door	Vaughan	Families with children
<u>Inn From the Cold</u>	Inn from the Cold	510 Penrose Street, Newmarket	Adults (Ages 16+)
<u>Kevin's Place</u>	Blue Door	18838 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Adult men (Ages 16+)
<u>Leeder Place</u>	Blue Door	18838 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Families with children and dependents
<u>Out of the Cold (East Gwillimbury)</u>	Blue Door	18408 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Adults (Ages 16+)
<u>Out of the Cold (Markham)</u>	Blue Door	7452 Reesor Road, Markham	Adults (Ages 16+)
<u>Passage House</u>	Blue Door	18838 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Adult men (Ages 16+)
<u>Porter Place</u>	Blue Door	18838 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Adult men (Ages 16+)

Sutton Youth Services	Salvation Army	20898 Dalton Road, Georgina	Youth (Ages 16 to 26)
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2.6 Drop-In Programs

Drop-in programs for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness are operated by service providers throughout York Region. Programs offer food and beverages, personal care services including washrooms with showers, access to technology and Wi-Fi, case management and peer support.

Drop-in Programs				
Service Provider and Program	Location	Eligibility	Hours	Contact
<u>360°kids - Home Base</u>	10415 Yonge Street, Suite D Richmond Hill	Youth (Ages 13 to 26)	Monday to Friday: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.	416-948-2186
<u>Canadian Mental Health Association - Community Connections</u>	15150 Yonge Street, Aurora and 710-3601 Highway 7 East, Markham	Adults (16+)	Call for hours	905-841-3977 ext. 4248
<u>Cornerstone to Recovery - Connections</u>	570 Steven Court, Unit B Newmarket	Adults (16+)	Monday to Friday: 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.	905-762-1551
<u>Inn from the Cold (Newmarket)</u>	17837 Yonge Street, Newmarket	Adults (16+)	Monday to Sunday: 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. (statutory holidays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.)	647-512-8754
<u>Inn From the Cold (Georgina)</u>	The Link Room #3, 20849 Dalton Road, Georgina	Adults (16+)	Monday to Sunday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (including statutory holidays)	365-340-3353
<u>Krasman Centre</u>	10121 Yonge Street, Richmond Hill	Adults (16+)	Monday, Thursday, Friday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday:	416-509-9681

			12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sunday, and Holidays: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.	
<u>Salvation Army - Belinda's Place</u>	16580 Yonge Street, Newmarket	Adult women (16+)	Daily: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.	289-366-4673
<u>Salvation Army - Sutton Youth Services</u>	20898 Dalton Road, Georgina	Youth (Ages 26 and under)	Daily: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.	905-722-9076

2.5 Municipal Locations Open to the Public

Municipal facilities are open for all York Region residents to access [cool spaces](#) during operating hours. Depending on the facility, access to water fountains, washrooms, computers, telephones and Wi-Fi may be offered. Visit your [local municipality's website](#) for more information about municipal facilities open to the public.

2.6 Community Meal Programs

People experiencing or at risk of homelessness can access community meal programs and prepared meals at no cost, which are offered daily at various locations throughout York Region.

Community Meal Programs			
Day	Hours	Facility	Location
Monday	4 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.	St. John Chrysostom Church	432 Ontario Street, Newmarket
Tuesday	9 a.m. to 10 a.m.	York Region Food Network	350 Industrial Parkway South, Aurora
	4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Trinity United Church	461 Park Avenue, Newmarket
Wednesday	11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.	Christian Baptist Church	127 Main Street, Newmarket
	5 p.m. to 6 p.m.	Trinity Anglican Church	79 Victoria Street, Aurora
Thursday*	11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m.*	St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church	484 Water Street, Newmarket
	4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Cedarview Church	1000 Gorham Road, Newmarket

* St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church operates its community meal program on the second and fourth Thursday of each month only.

	5 p.m.	Keswick Presbyterian Church	23449 Woodbine Avenue, Georgina
Friday	4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Inn from the Cold	510 Penrose Street, Newmarket
Saturday	4:30 p.m. to 5:45 p.m.	Crosslands Church	47 Millard Street West, Newmarket
Sunday	4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Valley View Alliance Church	800 Davis Drive, Newmarket

2.7 Indoor Temperatures

York Region Homelessness Community Programs works with Housing York Inc., emergency housing service providers and Housing with Supports operators to ensure clients have access to air conditioning in all York Region funded congregate living facilities.

2.8 Outreach and Encampments

York Region Outreach Services staff provide wraparound services and supports to people living unsheltered, including in encampments, year-round. This includes referrals to programs that offer rapid rehousing, income support, employment services, mental health and addiction programs, medical care and other individualized support as needed. Outreach Services staff are provided with resources to help them identify the signs and symptoms of heat stroke and heat exhaustion to better support people living unsheltered during Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings.

During Heat Warnings, Extended Heat Warnings, and wildfire smoke events where an Air Quality Advisory is issued, Outreach Services will focus their efforts on the health and safety of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

The LOFT Crosslinks Outreach Van is a mobile service that provides food, clothing, harm reduction supplies and heat safety and cooling supplies to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in York Region. The Outreach Van operates seven days per week from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. and can be contacted by calling or texting **1-866-553-4053**.

2.9 Transportation

York Region Homelessness Community Programs works with service providers and York Region Transit (YRT) to help people experiencing homelessness access public transportation. Service providers supply clients with public transportation fares and offer supplementary transportation support, including taxi fares and rides through program vehicles. YRT's [Mobility On-Request](#) transit service – a ride-sharing service that allows people to request transit when and where they need it – is available to seniors within select service areas throughout York Region.

YRT Enforcement staff will receive Heat Warning and Extended Heat Warning notifications from York Region Public Health and support people experiencing homelessness using the transit system and facilities at bus terminals. YRT Enforcement staff are provided with heat safety and cooling supplies, bus transfer tickets and other resources to distribute to support people experiencing homelessness.

3.0 Acknowledgements

York Region would like to acknowledge the efforts of local municipalities and community partners to develop and implement the Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness. This work involves coordination with the Region's Homelessness Community Programs, Public Health, Access York, Transit and Paramedic Services.

York Region would also like to express its gratitude towards its partners, which include emergency housing and seasonal shelter providers, local municipalities, York Regional Police, Fire Services, United Way Greater Toronto, and other community agencies serving people experiencing homelessness throughout York Region.

4.0 Additional Resources

1. [Heat-Related Health Risks for People Experiencing Homelessness: A Rapid Review](#)
2. [Heat Illness Requiring Emergency Care for People Experiencing Homelessness: A Case Study Series](#)
3. [World Health Organization. Heat and health](#)
4. [Interventions to Mitigate Health Harms of Heat Events](#)
5. [A Harmonized Heat Warning and Information System for Ontario \(HWIS\)](#)
6. [Heat alert and response systems in Canada: A check-up on preparedness](#)

For more information about York Region's Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness, contact HCPWeatherAlerts@york.ca