

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

2025 TO 2026 COLD WEATHER RESPONSE PLAN FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

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YORK REGION

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The Cold Weather Response Plan for People Experiencing Homelessness is a living document that will be updated annually to incorporate changes and enhancements in response to lessons learned, trends in homelessness and new community programs.

1.0 Introduction

The Regional Municipality of York (York Region) is committed to fostering welcoming and inclusive communities where people have access to the services they need. To create welcoming and inclusive communities for people experiencing homelessness, York Region partners with service providers to ensure programs, supports and services are delivered using a person-centered, equitable and collaborative approach. This approach reflects best practices that meet each person's unique needs, circumstances, and experiences. York Region's Cold Weather Response Plan for People Experiencing Homelessness helps to achieve this goal by expanding services throughout the cold weather season.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

York Region's 2025-2026 Cold Weather Response Plan for People Experiencing Homelessness (the Plan) provides access to expanded supports and services for people experiencing homelessness in York Region during the cold weather season. The Plan is in effect from October 1, 2025, to April 30, 2026, although there may be occasions where periods of cold weather fall outside of this timeframe. The Plan involves:

- Alerting people experiencing homelessness, other members of the public and community partners that cold weather conditions are expected or currently exist
- Providing information about services for people experiencing homelessness during the cold weather season
- Collaborating with service providers to temporarily increase system capacity

1.2 COLD WEATHER AND HOMELESSNESS

People experiencing homelessness may spend extended periods of time outside, which can have negative health impacts during cold weather. Prolonged exposure to cold weather can lead to frostbite, hypothermia, and even death. Risks can be affected by environmental elements such as temperature, wind, precipitation, and sun, as well as individual factors including age, health condition, clothing, and level of activity.

York Region Homelessness Community Programs coordinates the cold weather response for people experiencing homelessness, which includes temporarily increasing system capacity by adding additional emergency housing beds during the cold weather season. The impact of cold temperatures can be harmful. However, York Region strives to prevent and reduce negative health outcomes with the following interventions:

- Advising the public that cold weather is expected
- Distributing educational materials and supplies
- Directing people to public spaces to stay warm
- Providing street outreach

1.3 YORK REGION PUBLIC HEALTH EXTREME COLD WARNINGS

Notifications for the General Public and Partners

York Region Public Health issues notifications to the public and partners (e.g., York Region staff, local municipal staff, community partners) when Extreme Cold Warnings are issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada for York Region. Warnings are issued when the temperature or wind chill is expected to reach -30°C for at least two hours.

York Region Public Health also shares information and tips on how to keep safe during cold weather at york.ca/ExtremeCold

2.0 2025 to 2026 Cold Weather Response Plan for People Experiencing Homelessness

2.1 ISSUING COLD WEATHER ALERTS FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Recognizing that people experiencing homelessness are disproportionately vulnerable to the adverse health effects of cold weather compared to the general population, York Region Homelessness Community Programs issues Cold Weather Alerts for people experiencing homelessness when temperatures are forecast to be -15°C or colder, with or without windchill anywhere in York Region.

York Region Homelessness Community Programs issues discretionary Special Weather Alerts when extreme weather events have the potential to put people experiencing homelessness at greater risk, including but not limited to, extreme snow, ice or freezing rain and natural disasters. Similar to a Cold Weather Alert, when a Special Weather Alert is issued, emergency housing overflow beds will be activated.

The following steps are taken to issue a Cold Weather Alert for people experiencing homelessness in York Region:

1. York Region Homelessness Community Programs staff monitor the [Environment and Climate Change Canada](#) weather report daily. Environment and Climate Change Canada is the only weather report used to determine when a Cold Weather Alert will be issued.
2. Staff will make every effort to issue Cold Weather Alerts by 9 a.m. to provide sufficient time to activate the cold weather response. When temperatures are forecast to reach -15°C or colder, with or without windchill in any local municipality in York Region during overnight hours from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m., staff will issue a Cold Weather Alert.
3. The Cold Weather Alert will remain in place for 24 hours. If the forecast changes throughout the day and temperatures of -15°C or colder are expected, a Cold Weather Alert will be issued as soon as possible.
4. York Region staff and community partners who provide services to people experiencing homelessness will be notified of the Cold Weather Alert.

5. Social media posts will be used to advise members of the public that a Cold Weather Alert for people experiencing homelessness has been issued.
6. York Region Homelessness Community Programs staff will notify the Cold Weather Alert distribution list by email when a Cold Weather Alert has been extended or ended.

To be added to the distribution list to receive Cold Weather Alerts for people experiencing homelessness, send an email to: HCPWeatherAlerts@york.ca

2.2 DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPLIES

York Region Community Paramedicine, Outreach Services and Transit Enforcement staff will distribute supplies to unsheltered individuals to help mitigate the effects of cold weather. Supplies include hats, gloves, neck warmers, socks, thermal underwear and instant warming packs. In addition to providing supplies, these teams will share information about emergency housing services and help people access available supports. York Region Homelessness Community Programs will provide information on funding sources, as available and applicable, to service providers who wish to purchase cold weather-related supplies.

2.3 EMERGENCY HOUSING CENTRAL INTAKE LINE

People experiencing homelessness in York Region who are 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, including seasonal shelters, and provides referrals to other resources, as appropriate. To maintain space in the emergency housing system, the EHCIL and York Region Outreach Services will work to divert people from emergency housing by providing assistance to find safe and appropriate alternative housing options, such as staying with family or friends and/or providing short-term emergency financial assistance for accommodation or other basic necessities. Staff will provide people experiencing homelessness with additional supports during Cold Weather Alerts, as appropriate, which may include transportation and gift cards to purchase food and warm beverages.

2.4 UPDATES FOR THE 2025 TO 2026 COLD WEATHER SEASON

York Region is implementing several initiatives through the [Homelessness Service System Plan 2024-2027](#) and the accompanying [rapid deployment actions](#). This includes response, 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, including during the cold weather season.

Homelessness Prevention, Diversion and Response Services

- Continuing York Region Outreach Services' expanded 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

- Continuing operating three seasonal shelter programs in East Gwillimbury, Markham, and rotating locations in Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan
- Increasing bed capacity at the Markham seasonal shelter
- Adding cold weather season and Cold Weather Alert overflow beds at emergency housing program locations
- Extending seasonal shelter programs until June 2026
- Maintaining increased emergency housing beds through rapid deployment actions

Drop-in programs

- Maintaining expanded hours at the Newmarket drop-in program

2.5 EMERGENCY HOUSING AND SEASONAL SHELTERS

Throughout the year, emergency and transitional housing and violence against women shelters provide a range of life stabilization services to help residents experiencing homelessness. Services include meals, clothing, transportation, case management, and referrals to housing, employment and income supports. Seasonal shelter programs provide emergency overnight accommodation to people experiencing homelessness during the cold weather season.

The table below shows emergency housing and seasonal shelter capacity for the 2025-2026 cold weather season. More information about emergency housing and seasonal shelters in York Region can be found at york.ca/EmergencyHousing

Emergency Housing and Seasonal Shelters						
Service Provider and Program	Location	Eligibility	Regular Emergency Housing Capacity	New Rapid Deployment Emergency Housing Beds	2025-26 Cold Weather Season Beds ¹	2025-26 Cold Weather Alert Overflow Beds ²
<u>360°kids – Connections</u>	10415 Yonge Street, Richmond Hill	Youth (Ages 16 to 26)	14 beds	3 beds	6 beds	4 beds
<u>Blue Door – Kevin’s Place</u>	18838 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Adult men (Ages 16+)	10 beds	-	-	-
<u>Blue Door – Leeder Place</u>	18838 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Families with children and dependents	15 rooms	-	-	-
<u>Blue Door – Out of the Cold (Markham, Richmond Hill, Vaughan)</u>	Rotating locations in Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan	Adults (Ages 16+)	-	-	30 beds	6 beds
<u>Blue Door – Out of the Cold (East Gwillimbury)</u>	18408 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Adults (Ages 16+)	-	-	30 beds	-
<u>Blue Door – Out of the Cold (Markham)</u>	7452 Reesor Road, Markham	Adults (Ages 16+)	-	-	35 beds	-
<u>Blue Door – Porter Place</u>	18838 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Adult men (Ages 16+)	30 beds	-	-	6 beds
<u>Blue Door – Passage House</u>	18838 Yonge Street, East Gwillimbury	Adult men (Ages 16+)	-	-	-	8 beds
<u>Blue Door – Hotel Overflow for Families with Children</u>	Vaughan	Families with children	40 rooms	-	-	-
<u>Blue Door – Hotel Overflow for Adults</u>	Vaughan	Adults (Ages 16+)	20 rooms	-	-	-
<u>Inn From the Cold</u>	510 Penrose Street, Newmarket	Adults (Ages 16+)	30 beds	-	-	4 beds

<u>Salvation Army Belinda's Place</u>	16580 Yonge Street, Newmarket	Adult women (Ages 16+)	28 beds	12 beds	-	-
Salvation Army – Sutton Youth Services	20898 Dalton Road, Georgina	Youth (Ages 16 to 26)	16 beds	14 beds	-	3 beds
Total			203 households	29 individuals	96 individuals	31 individuals

¹Cold weather season beds will operate for the duration of the cold weather season to expand system capacity.

²Cold Weather Alert overflow beds will open overnight when a Cold Weather Alert is active. The overflow beds will close when the Cold Weather Alert has ended.

2.6 DROP-IN PROGRAMS

Drop-in programs provide a warm space, food and beverages, access to personal care services including washrooms with showers, access to technology and Wi-Fi, case management support to find housing, peer support and opportunities for social connection. Detailed information about drop-in program locations and hours can be found at york.ca/EmergencyHousing

2.7 OUTREACH AND ENCAMPMENTS

York Region Outreach Services staff provide wraparound supports to people sheltering outdoors and in encampments year-round. This includes referrals to programs that offer rapid rehousing, income support, employment services, mental health and substance use programs, medical care and other individualized support as needed. Outreach staff use a Regional application to track encampment locations, that is updated regularly as encampment sizes and locations change. Outreach staff provide supports and supplies in areas where there may be increased risk during Cold Weather Alerts to help mitigate negative health impacts and will encourage people sheltering outdoors to come inside to access overflow spaces. To access supports from York Region Outreach Services, people experiencing homelessness are encouraged to contact Access York at **1-877-464-9675**.

The LOFT Crosslinks Outreach Van is a mobile service that provides food, clothing and harm reduction supplies to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in York Region. The Outreach Van operates seven days a week from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. and can be contacted by calling or texting: **416-274-4972** or calling toll free: **1-866-553-4053**.

2.8 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 using program vehicles or by providing taxi fares, as appropriate. 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 65+ within select service areas throughout York Region.

YRT Enforcement staff are notified of Cold Weather Alerts, and they liaise regularly with Homelessness Community Programs staff to collaborate on strategies to support people experiencing homelessness. YRT staff have resources to distribute at their discretion to support people experiencing homelessness.

2.9 MUNICIPAL LOCATIONS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Municipal facilities are open for all York Region residents during operating hours. Services vary by facility and may include access to water fountains, washrooms, computers, telephones, and Wi-Fi. Visit [Find Warm Spaces in York Region](#) for more information about municipal facilities open to the public.

2.10 COMMUNITY MEAL PROGRAMS AND FOOD BANKS

People at risk of or experiencing homelessness can access community meal programs and prepared meals at no cost, which are offered daily at various locations throughout York Region. Information about community meal programs can be found at york.ca/EmergencyHousing. Information about food banks is available at fbyr.ca/find-food/.

3.0 Acknowledgements

York Region would like to acknowledge the efforts of York Region staff, local municipalities and community partners to develop and implement the Cold Weather Response Plan. 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.

For more information about York Region's Cold Weather Response Plan for People Experiencing Homelessness contact: HCPWeatherAlerts@york.ca

4.0 Additional Resources

1. [Cold Weather Conditions and Risk of Hypothermia Among People Experiencing Homelessness: Implications for Prevention Strategies - PMC](#)
2. [Extreme Cold | York Region](#)
3. [Extreme cold - Canada.ca](#)
4. [Health impacts of cold exposure among people experiencing homelessness: A narrative systematic review on risks and risk-reduction approaches - ScienceDirect](#)