Growing Pains: An Urgent Message from the Strong Communities Coalition

United Way
of Peel, York, Durham
and Oakville

“You identify family issues, suggest a program to enhance their lives and then you have nothing to offer them because all the programs are full and there are long waiting lists. How can we help in every area of life - mental, medical and emotional - without available and appropriate services?”

— Hanna Losiak
Family Services Worker

An Urgent Message from the Strong Communities Coalition

The Strong Communities Coalition is an alliance of United Ways of Oakville, Peel, York, Durham, and the GTA/905 Healthcare Alliance.

Comprehensive, quality health care and social services are readily and locally accessible to all GTA/905 residents in a timely fashion.

To advocate for equitable and sustainable funding policies and formulae for health and social services in the GTA/905 communities.

The four regions, Durham, Halton, Peel and York - the “905” portion of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA/905) - are undergoing a population surge.

- people, equivalent to a city the size of Kingston, have moved into the GTA/905 each .
- The rapid population growth of the GTA/905 is projected to continue for the next 20 years, as confirmed by each of the four regional governments and the forecast in *Places to Grow*.
- The GTA/905 is not only growing, it is .
- New immigrants have accounted for . Peel and York have the second-highest volume of new immigrants in the country.

These factors place enormous pressures on the GTA/905's social service and health infrastructure. In fact, they are struggling to keep up with local needs because provincial funding for health and social services in the GTA/905 has not kept pace with the growing number of residents in these four regions.

The result is that three million Ontarians living and working in the GTA/905 are feeling “growing pains” and the pains are getting worse. Waits for health and social services are longer in the GTA/905. GTA/905 residents often have to leave their communities to get services, which means not having the support of family and friends. In many cases, residents are going without needed services.

Objectives of ‘Places to Grow’ at Risk

Lack of access to these services means the GTA/905 communities are not as healthy and vibrant as they could be. Without thriving communities in the GTA/905, the economic engine of the Golden Horseshoe, *Places to Grow* will be at risk of not realizing its objectives and potential. This means increased growing pains for more than three million Ontarians living in the regions of Durham, Halton, Peel and York and those expected to join them in the coming years.

The key factor contributing to the lack of fairness and the funding inequity for health and social services in the GTA/905 is that Ontario's health and social services funding is primarily allocated on the basis of historical patterns. Population growth and demographics are generally not being considered.

All Ontarians timely and local access to health and social services so that they can fully contribute to the economic activities of the province. Supportive and caring communities make for thriving communities. Thriving communities attract investments and jobs. Investments in GTA/905 human services will reduce crime rates and decrease provincial health care costs in the long term. With access to the full array of human services, people living in these communities are more productive members of the local economy and less likely to take time away from work.

“The families we work with are often in crisis and experience great difficulty in obtaining the services and supports they need. This lack of available and immediately accessible services leads to frustration and further erodes the family's ability to care for their children.”

— Paul Zarnke
Executive Director
Peel Children's Aid

Revise Funding Allocation for Human Services

Government investment in human services contributes to the strength of communities, stimulates economic activity and engages immigrants in the workforce. For Ontario's *Places to Grow* plan to maximize its impact economically, more attention and fairer funding are needed for the human services infrastructure in Ontario's high-growth regions such as the GTA/905.

The funding approach to most social and health services has not substantially changed since being established prior to the major growth in the GTA/905 over the past 15 years. When any new funding approach has been applied, it *has not addressed the cumulative funding inequity* that has been growing as the population grows. While some positive steps have been made to allocate certain provincial resources on the basis of population and growth, these attempts have been ad hoc and not sustained, such as the *Best Start* program and growth funding for hospitals.

How Funding Can Be Improved

In order to recognize population, *Best Start* used a formula that allocated 40% based on population and 60% on a variety of other equity and social risk factors. In doing so, *Best Start* funding better targeted needs across Ontario. This is one example of how the funding for provincial social services can be improved. Unfortunately, this new program has been substantially curtailed due to the federal government's decision to cancel the childcare funding being used to support its expansion.

Another example from health care was the use of "growth funding" for hospitals between 1996 and 1999 and the later move towards a population-based funding formula to allocate new hospital funding. Subsequently, growth funding was eliminated and the funding formula has been compromised.

Best Start provides valuable learning about how Ontario can move to population-based funding for social services. In addition, the establishment of Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) provides an opportunity to move towards population-based funding for health care services in Ontario. As well, several provinces in Canada, such as Alberta and British Columbia, successfully use population-based funding for health and/or social services.

In terms of health and social service needs of Ontarians living in or moving into high-growth regions in the province, *Places to Grow* offers a vision that speaks towards building *complete communities* that "accommodate people in all stages of life, have the right mix of housing, a good range of jobs and easy access to stores and services to meet their daily needs."