

SOCIAL CAPITAL STRONG IN YORK REGION, BUT INEQUITABLY DISTRIBUTED: REPORT *United Way Greater Toronto releases first assessment of social capital in York*

July 20, 2021 – Social capital supports one’s well-being and success in good times, but it is particularly essential in hard times. What has helped many people through the pandemic has been knowing how to access local services, trusting the institutions disseminating information and vaccines, having friends to call on for connection, and having neighbours to assist when needed – all examples of social capital in action. United Way Greater Toronto released the [York Region Social Capital Study](#) this morning – the first report to measure social capital in York Region, assessing pre-pandemic baseline levels. While the results are largely encouraging, there is a clear divide along financial lines. The report can inform how sectors work together to overcome those disparities – mitigating crises in the worst of times, and helping people thrive in the best of them. The study was undertaken with support from The Regional Municipality of York, York Regional Police, and Wellesley Institute.

“If we want resilient communities, we need to understand what social capital looks like – who has how much and how we can close the gap,” said Daniele Zanotti, President & CEO, United Way Greater Toronto. “The community sector, including United Way’s network of agencies and partners, is an important bridge to social capital: where people build trust in neighbours; where they find community when it’s most needed; where they organize to improve their neighbourhoods.”

Specifically, the report assesses how much residents trust their neighbours and institutions; how extensive and satisfying their social connections are; how civically engaged they are; and how they feel about their neighbourhoods’ safety and services.

Key findings in York Region (data collected December 2018 - March 2019):

Pre-pandemic, social capital in York Region was strong: people had relatively high levels of trust, strong social networks, extensive civic connection, and neighbourhood support.

- **Trust:** About two-thirds (67%) of respondents agreed that most people can be trusted.
- **Social networks:** 90% of respondents said they had at least one family member they felt close to and 90% also said they had at least one friend they felt close to.
- **Civic connection:** 63% of respondents participated in at least one group or organization and 78% donated money or goods in the previous year.
- **Community:** Over three-quarters (76%) of respondents reported a very or somewhat strong sense of belonging to their local community, and 68% agreed that neighbours were willing to help one another.
 - 90% believed they could make a difference in addressing problems in their community.
 - 68% felt they had access to most (at least 75%) of the services they needed.

Even before the pandemic, people with lower incomes and less financial security faced greater barriers to accessing social capital.

- **Trust:** Respondents with household incomes under \$30,000 were less likely to agree or strongly agree that their neighbours could be trusted (41%) vs. those whose incomes were over \$150,000 (80%). They were also less likely to trust institutions and people with different ethnic backgrounds.

- **Community:** Respondents with incomes under \$30,000 were less likely to say that their neighbours were willing to help (52%) vs. those making over \$150,000 (84%). Only 17% of respondents with incomes under \$30,000 strongly agreed that their neighbourhood was safe for children to play in vs. 47% of those making over \$150,000.

In order to plan for and invest in an inclusive recovery that supports individuals' well-being, bolsters trust, and increases neighbourhood cohesion, all sectors will need to continue to address systemic issues like poverty, financial insecurity, and discrimination that impact the uneven distribution of social capital.

A complementary report on Peel Region has also been released today, which can be found at unitedwaygt.org.

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Quotes from York Region Social Capital Study partners:

Wayne Emmerson, York Region Chairman and CEO: "Together with our partners, York Region is focused on supporting the health and well-being of our community. Collective actions will help us emerge stronger as we will continue to build strong, caring and safe communities we all call home."

Jim MacSween, B.A.A., Chief of Police, York Regional Police: "Police rely on public support, so I'm pleased that York Regional Police continues to enjoy a high level of trust among our citizens. We work with community partners to promote equity and inclusion so everyone feels that they belong. Emerging social justice issues have reinforced the importance of nurturing social capital in community. We are committed to enhancing the ways in which we engage with, listen to, and learn from all our residents."

Kwame McKenzie, CEO, Wellesley Institute: "Social capital can help communities be healthier and more resilient. We are happy to have supported this report because it gives policy makers a blueprint for starting to build social capital, which will be crucial in establishing a new normal post-pandemic in two of the fastest growing areas of the GTA."

About United Way Greater Toronto: As the largest non-government funder of community services in the GTA, United Way Greater Toronto reinforces a crucial community safety net. United Way's network of agencies and initiatives in neighbourhoods across Peel, Toronto and York Region works to ensure that everyone has access to the programs and services they need to thrive today. Mobilizing the network and other community support, United Way tackles #UNIGNORABLE issues linked to poverty. United Way's work is rooted in ground-breaking research, strategic leadership, local advocacy and cross-sectoral partnerships committed to building lasting solutions to the GTA's greatest challenges. unitedwaygt.org

About The Regional Municipality of York: The Regional Municipality of York consists of nine local cities and towns and provides a variety of programs and services to 1.2 million residents and 54,000 businesses with 650,000 employees. More information about the Region's key service areas is available at york.ca/regionalservices

About York Regional Police: As a [2021 Greater Toronto Top Employer](#) and internationally recognized policing leader, York Regional Police core services include crime prevention, law enforcement, maintaining the public peace, emergency response and assistance to victims. Our policing jurisdiction includes nine municipalities and is one of the most diverse and fastest-growing regions in Canada. Today, our more than 1,600 sworn officers and 600 civilians work closely with citizens, local businesses, policing partners, and community organizations to promote strong, safe and healthy communities. We are committed to professionalism, innovation, inclusion and collaboration. Together, we can make a difference in our communities.

About Wellesley Institute: Wellesley Institute advances population health and reduces health inequities by driving change on the social determinants of health through applied research, effective policy solutions, knowledge mobilization, and innovation.

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