

Citizens' Bulletin

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Vaughan
Tomorrow
our city. our future.

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Social Services



Vaughan is a rapidly growing community actively transitioning from a suburban municipality into a more urban and diverse place. Part of planning for the growth that Vaughan is experiencing includes developing strategies for new infrastructure, places for living, recreation and commerce. Growth planning also includes creating strategies to address the social service needs of the people in this growing community.

To better meet the social service needs of its citizens, the City has conducted a study to understand the current state of social services in Vaughan today. The Study was intended to think about how social services are going to change and develop ideas about how to improve social service delivery in the future. This bulletin describes the highlights of the Social Services Study and includes emerging ideas about how the City can make an impact on social service needs.

Social service focus areas

On the whole, Vaughan is a relatively wealthy municipality where most people enjoy a high quality of life. Like any other growing city though, there are segments of the Vaughan population that require social services.

While the City of Vaughan in many cases does not deliver social services, that responsibility often falls to the Region of York and to independent agencies, the City does have an ability, through its new Official Plan and other measures, to make a positive impact on social service needs.

The following describes some of the current data related to social services in the following categories:

- 1. Children & Families**
- 2. Youth**
- 3. Seniors**
- 4. Affordability, Housing & Income**
- 5. New Immigrants**
- 6. Physical & Mental Health**

Children & Families



Vaughan is an attractive place for families and children today and the city will continue to be attractive to families in the future. There are many different kinds of families in Vaughan: between 2001 and 2006, the single parent household was the fastest growing type of family and the number of families on low income grew. Many families need a variety of supports to make ends meet and improve their lives: food banks, subsidized child care and parenting programs are among the services used by families in the city. As Vaughan grows it must be prepared to meet the needs of this important part of its population.

Youth



Youth are an important part of Vaughan's population and while there are some programs and services targeted to youth, social service providers report a lack of variety of services and programs available. Vaughan also has a relatively high rate of youth unemployment. Many youth are unaware of programs available to them or they are unable to get to programs or to job opportunities because of poor public transit options. Appropriate transportation is a prerequisite to having a mobile, well-served youth population in Vaughan.

Seniors



Vaughan has one of the fastest growing population of seniors in the region. Between 2006 and 2031 the number of people 55 years or older is expected to more than double. Seniors are the users of many social services ranging from health-related services to day programs. As the seniors population grows the number of services provided to seniors will need to expand and the ability for seniors to use these services must be considered. Seniors' physical and financial accessibility: is there accessible public transportation to get to the doctor's appointment? Can a low income senior afford meals on wheels? are important factors to consider when thinking about seniors and social services in the future.

Affordability, Housing & Income



Vaughan's housing is dominated by the presence of single family homes. While a suitable choice for many people, there is evidence to suggest that there is a need for different types of housing that is more affordable. Many people are spending too much of their income on housing. Across the city almost 30 percent of people are spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. As a result of a lack of affordable housing choices there has been a significant rise in the number of multifamily households. Some make this choice for cultural reasons, but for many they don't have an alternative. Providing a range of housing that is suitable for different incomes could help alleviate the need for other services such as employment income support or food banks.

New Immigrants



Vaughan is a city that has been shaped by immigrants. Immigrants contribute greatly to the vitality and diversity of the city, but they also tend to have greater social service needs than the wider population. Some immigrants, just like the main stream population, may need subsidized child care, parenting programs or access to a food bank. They also face similar barriers to services as other groups in Vaughan including lack of adequate and reliable public transportation. Because some immigrants may not have a full command of English they also face linguistic barriers in accessing social services. It is important to provide linguistically appropriate services in specific communities of need to improve the quality of life for new immigrants.

Physical & Mental Health



Physical and mental health services are among the most used social services in the city today. The need for these services is expected to grow considerably in the future as the population of Vaughan grows. The health profile of Vaughan indicates that the city is not as healthy as it could be: Vaughan currently has a high rate of obesity and a growing rate of people with type 2 diabetes. Vaughan also suffers from a lack of physicians and psychiatrists, falling below the average number of doctors found elsewhere in the region. The need for health services is related to the very way in which Vaughan's communities are designed. Thoughtful city building and the development of complete, healthy communities can contribute to the prevention of future health care needs.

What can the City do?



With an understanding of social service needs now and in the future, the City is beginning to think about what actions it can take to address these needs and make a positive impact on social services.

Because the City is not a social service provider it must think of other ways to impact services. There are four areas in particular where the City can have a great impact on the need for social services.

Housing

From seniors to large families, single parent households to new immigrants, housing choice is an important part of developing healthy, strong communities in Vaughan. A focus on creating a range of housing choices for residents may relieve the pressure on multi-family living arrangements or provide opportunities for those with low income to make better housing decisions. Housing, and specifically the provision of affordable, adequate housing choices, could be a major area of social service improvement in Vaughan.

Urban Design and Land Use

Decisions made now about urban design and land use can help improve physical access to services in the city and provide the physical space for services to exist through land use permissions. Policy that directs new services to locations well served by transit and produces environments that are more conducive to walking and cycling would create more opportunities to lead an active lifestyle, reducing the need for health-related services

Transportation

Changing and enhancing peoples options for getting around the city could improve access to social services and provide a degree of independence for those who have limited mobility or don't have a car of their own. Increasing ridership and value of service for people who need public transit the most, including youth, new immigrants and seniors, is an important way for the City to impact social services.

Advocacy

The City can play a large role in defining the social service agenda in York Region by advocating for the needs of its citizens. Strategic actions by the City such as encouraging the development of mixed use public facilities, extending the reach of existing City-sponsored youth programs like the Youth Cabinet or establishing a community liaison position to better connect people to social services are ways that the City can positively influence the social service profile of Vaughan.

To read the complete Social Services report, visit vaughantomorrow.ca