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“York in York Region” York University’s Strategic Advantage

Faculty of Health: An Innovative Leader

On July 1, 2006, York University launched the new Faculty of Health. Four academic schools, over 9,000 students and a broad range of health researchers in the fields of psychology, kinesiology and health sciences, nursing and health policy and management were joined to create a world-leading Faculty that embodies innovation, compassion and impact.

Our Faculty’s **Research** addresses health and human sciences at all levels – from molecular to global. Integrative approaches to health research at York span the continuum from the laboratory to the bedside to the community. Our **Education** includes a full spectrum of lifelong learning opportunities from undergraduate and graduate levels through to continuing professional development and community-based education. Our **Service** activities engage and support the broader University as well as local, regional and national communities, with the aim of focusing on global health and reducing disparities that significantly impact health and well-being. At the heart of the new Faculty is a question with prevention at its root: *how do we keep people healthier, longer?*

The new Faculty has been created at an opportune time to respond to the rapidly emerging and complex needs of the community in which York University is situated. York University neighbours the large Regional Municipality of York, also called York Region, in south-central Ontario between Lake Simcoe and Toronto.

York Region: Diverse, Dynamic Growth

York Region is the fastest growing region in Canada, with 900,000 residents and estimated 1.28 million by 2020, both rural and urban, experiencing a variety of needs and interests. Joining pace of growth is the tremendous diversity within the area. York Region is home to more than 65 languages; current estimates suggest that 40% of York Region’s population is comprised of immigrants – a higher than average proportion compared to other parts of the province. This proportion is expected to grow over the next 20 years, as the population diversifies and expands.

In addition to a tremendous diversity, the region is experiencing rapidly changing demographics related to age and income. As is being experienced Canada-wide, York Region is home to a burgeoning aging population: By 2026, it is anticipated that 21% of York Region’s population will be senior citizens (65+).

York University looks on to both wealth and disparity. Major industry clusters such as biotechnology, information technology, building construction and manufacturing are found here. Yet, low-income households such as those in the Jane & Finch area surround the York University campus – neighbourhoods that traditionally experience the poorest health status and the lowest rates of access to health resources and services.

What does this mean for the health of the region?

Health care is a top issue affecting York region, in terms of access to both practitioners and health services locally. Recent studies have found that health care services in the 905 area are currently lacking as compared to the Greater Toronto Area, and many residents – particularly in rural areas – may be greatly underserved with respect to physical and mental health services.

A diabetes 'pandemic' is sweeping across Ontario, shortening lives and threatening to overwhelm the health care system. In Ontario, the prevalence of diabetes has increased 69% since 1995, with residents of York Region experiencing among the highest rates of the disease. Smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol markedly increase the chance that persons with diabetes will develop vascular complications such as heart attacks and strokes. These risk factors are common among Ontarians with diabetes.

Immigrant groups in York Region are particularly vulnerable to ill-health. There is increasing evidence that the social and economic deprivation and disadvantage often associated with the resettlement process exposes newcomers to a range of risk factors for health; risks that are magnified for women.

As part of the province of Ontario's health transformation agenda, the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) was established to plan, coordinate, integrate and fund the delivery of health services at the local level. York University falls within the boundaries of the **Central LHIN** – an area with a population of 1.6 million, sweeping the northern section of City of Toronto, most of York Region, and southern Simcoe County. The area represents 12.5% of the provincial population, yet its 2006 budget for health services represented 8% of provincial health spending (approximately \$1.3 billion).

The Central LHIN includes 100 health services providers, including hospitals, long term care homes, Community Care Access Homes, Community Health Centres and support services and Mental Health & Aging services. Providing medical care in the region are York's three large general hospitals: York Central, Markham-Stouffville and Southlake Regional Health Centre, and a new hospital is being planned for the City of Vaughan.

The Faculty of Health in York Region

York University itself is a microcosm of what is happening in York Region. Almost 24% of applicants to the University come from York Region. 17% of York University alumni live here. The Faculty of Health stands to respond to the particular and changing needs facing the Region through our research, education and community partnerships.

Though many health-related challenges face this unique region, there are also a number of significant opportunities for synergy - enhancing the **Supply** -side of the health care system by sharing our expertise, working with partners to support evidence-based decision making, and answering the knowledge needs of our community, while reducing the **Demand** – side for already widely-stretched health care services through prevention and health promotion.

The Faculty of Health envisions incredible opportunities for partnership in York region and the broader Greater Toronto Area. Post-SARS, both the federal and Ontario governments are establishing new public health agencies that involve academic partnerships. Our Faculty is engaged in dialogue with a number of vital organizations in the region, including the York Region United Way, York Central Hospital and Markham-Stouffville Hospital. There is growing momentum surrounding the LHIN as a process that will make it easier for patients to access the care they need, and York University is stands to play a role in this integration.

The time is now

Approaching our 50th anniversary, York is Canada's third largest university and the Keele campus is the largest post-secondary site in Canada. An aging population, rapid technological change, and the growing rate of chronic diseases such as diabetes and the threat of pandemics, create an urgent need for increased health science research, innovative training for health professionals, knowledge transfer, and public-private sector collaboration. Our new Faculty of Health will allow for the confluence of excellence necessary to meet these challenges.

Building on our traditional strengths in the humanities and social sciences, York University is developing new and innovative approaches to health and human sciences.

What is our future?

The new Faculty of Health is an important part of York's vision for the future, providing new opportunities for York to lead in the field of health promotion, prevention and health care in Canada. The promise of a medical school in the future represents a natural extension of current priorities and an opportunity to build upon the distinctiveness of both York University and York region. The new Faculty of Health is taking steps towards transformative change through a population-health approach. By understanding the broad factors that determine the health of individuals, communities and whole populations, our students learn effective approaches for keeping people healthy and sustaining our health system.

York University's Faculty of Health is positioned to make a major contribution to the health and well-being of residents in York Region and beyond. By working in partnership with community-based agencies, municipal government and health care centres in the region, our students and faculty have the opportunity to address emerging local and provincial health system priorities. Locally, this translates into the enhancement and sustainability of health for all in York Region.