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**For Information**

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**REPORT TITLE: Peel Poverty Reduction Committee 2021 Update**

**FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services**

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**OBJECTIVE**

To provide Regional Council with an update of the progress 2018-2028 Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy.

**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- The 2018-2028 Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy is based on three pillars: Economic Opportunity; Income Security; and Well-being and Social Inclusion.
  - The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a spotlight on individuals and families experiencing poverty in Peel Region, resulting in additional actions and advocacy by the Peel Poverty Reduction Committee.
  - Youth have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19; therefore, the Peel Poverty Reduction Committee is responding through engagement and creation of a youth specific strategy.
  - To advance the Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Peel Poverty Reduction Committee developed and expanded key partnerships with several stakeholders, including the Ontario Living Wage Network, Canada Revenue Agency and youth serving organizations.
  - In November, The Mississauga Food Bank became Peel's first certified Living Wage employer.
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**DISCUSSION**

**1. Background**

The Peel Poverty Reduction Committee (PPRC), co-chaired by the United Way Greater Toronto and the Region of Peel, was created in 2008. It is the first community-based poverty reduction committee to create a ten-year plan. The Committee is comprised of more than eighty partners from not-for-profit, public, and private sectors, working collectively to reduce and mitigate the impact of poverty in Brampton, Caledon, and Mississauga. Through engagement and co-design with the community, the PPRC developed its 2018-2028 Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy<sup>1</sup> (the Strategy) which Regional Council endorsed in May 2018 (Resolution 2018-458).

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<sup>1</sup> Poverty Reduction Strategy: [https://www.povertyinpeel.ca/\\_include/Peel-Poverty-Reduction-Strategy-2018-2028.pdf](https://www.povertyinpeel.ca/_include/Peel-Poverty-Reduction-Strategy-2018-2028.pdf)

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The PPRC's governance structure was implemented in 2020. There are specific action tables, including a Lived Experience Roundtable and an Advocacy and Awareness Roundtable, which drive the implementation of the three pillars of the Strategy.

Poverty in Peel remains a concern and has been magnified due to COVID-19. The unemployment rate remains high for many Peel residents especially youth fifteen to twenty-four years of age. According to Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, July 2021, the unemployment rate in Peel increased to 10.5 per cent, higher than the Ontario unemployment rate of 8.4 per cent. During the same period, the youth unemployment rate in Peel was 27.8 per cent, significantly higher than Ontario and Canada's youth unemployment rates of 13.6 per cent and 17.2 per cent, respectively. Low-income families and individuals, including racialized communities, women, part-time workers, and youth, make up a disproportionate number of people who are precariously employed in sectors that have been affected by the pandemic, and are therefore increasingly affected.

True to its vision and the increased pressure COVID-19 has placed on vulnerable and marginalized residents, the Strategy underscores that successful efforts to reduce poverty requires all stakeholders to confront its complexities and acknowledge that poverty affects people differently. Ultimately, vulnerable residents cannot achieve full prosperity without long term consistent support and meaningful opportunities. Appendix I - Poverty in Peel Facts at a Glance 2021 provides some examples of the extent of poverty in the region.

### 2. Update on the Implementation of the 2018-2028 Peel Poverty Reduction Strategy

The Strategy is based on three pillars: Economic Opportunity; Income Security; and Well-being and Social Inclusion. Priority setting is performed annually to measure continued progress towards the Strategy outcomes. As a result of the pandemic, short-term actions and outcomes were adapted to ensure they would positively impact residents experiencing low-income and be responsive to emergent issues. Below is a summary of PPRC's progress in 2021.

<b>Economic Opportunity</b>	
<b>Goals:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Stable and non-precarious employment opportunities, and</li> <li>b) Reduced systemic barriers including inequitable access to stable non-precarious employment and high-quality education for marginalized and equity-seeking groups.</li> </ul>	
<b>2021 Prioritized Outcomes</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased number of Living Wage employers</li> </ul>	<p>To increase certified Living Wage employers in the region the PPRS has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnered with the Ontario Living Wage Network to recalculate Peel's living wage rate for 2021 which is \$19.80, and to advance a living wage initiative in Peel.</li> <li>• PPRC recognized Peel's first certified living wage employer, The Mississauga Food Bank, who is leading the way for other employers to implement a living wage within their organizations in 2022.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed and executed a Living Wage campaign to further raise awareness of the program among Peel's employers during living wage week in November.</li> </ul>
<b>Income Security</b>	
<b>Goal:</b> Equitable and inclusive access to income that results in adequate income security for Peel residents.	
<b>2021 Prioritized Outcomes</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased awareness about tax programs or benefits available to residents experiencing income inequality</li> <li>Increased awareness about the impact of income inequality among stakeholders</li> </ul>	<p>In addressing income inequality, the PPRC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participated in the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada's consultation for the renewal of the National Financial Literacy Strategy on building a financial ecosystem that is accessible, inclusive, and effective for all Canadians.</li> <li>Developed and disseminated a Financial Literacy Infographic (Appendix II) throughout the community to encourage awareness of financial entitlements and tax filing for improved financial security.</li> <li>Established Peel's first Volunteer Income Tax Clinic Community of Practice in partnership with the Canada Revenue Agency, to provide a dedicated forum for 154 individuals representing 41 organizations to problem solving, share learnings and improve access.</li> <li>Four participating organizations shared data that highlighted the important role tax clinics play in ensuring residents experiencing low-income access all tax entitlements. These four organizations served 802 clients and approximately \$5.5M was returned to the pockets of residents through credits such as the Canada Child Benefit and the GST/HST rebate.</li> </ul>
<b>Well-being and Social Inclusion</b>	
<b>Goal:</b> Equitable and inclusive access to essential supports and services that meet the needs of Peel residents and their human rights.	
<b>2021 Prioritized Outcomes</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased understanding of social issues among Peel residents</li> <li>Increased mobilization of residents to advocate for themselves</li> </ul>	<p>Due to the significant challenges newly vulnerable residents and youth are facing as a result of the pandemic, the PPRC is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruiting four youth representatives to co-develop a strategy in partnership with BCG Peel (formerly Boys and Girls Club), Sheridan College, Peel District School Board and Dufferin-Peel Catholic School Board.</li> <li>Supporting a youth-led advisory table with youth representatives to ensure that the voices of youth are included in the poverty reduction work in Peel.</li> <li>Partnering with Tamarack Institute on a research project to understand the impact of COVID-19 on residents who were not previously in poverty but are now at risk due to</li> </ul>

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	the economic and social pressures linked to the pandemic.
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### 3. Increased Advocacy

In addition to action on the specific priorities noted above, the PPRC members advocate on a range of issues and provide feedback on federal, provincial, and municipal strategies that will positively impact people experiencing poverty.

#### a) Increased Awareness of PPRC Lived Experience Voices

The voices of the members of the PPRC's Lived Experience Roundtable remain central to the work of the PPRC. The Roundtable work in 2021, was two-pronged:

- focused on providing important feedback and input on a range of issues impacting people experiencing poverty; and,
- informed the work of the PPRC.

In 2021, there was an increase in Regional departments and other stakeholders requesting engagement with Lived Experience Members. Their expertise has been instrumental in the proposed changes to programs and initiatives that are intended to mitigate or reduce the impact of poverty. For example, the Lived Experience Roundtable members provided feedback on topics such as the new life stabilization model for Ontario Works clients and the Public Works' review of water and wastewater utility rates. In addition, they participated in the Yes in My Backyard (YIMBY) podcast hosted by the Housing Services Division, that sought to debunk "not in my backyard" housing myths and encourage community members to show their support for housing initiatives that meet the needs of individuals who are low-income or experiencing homelessness.

#### b) Advocacy Actions

This year, the PPRC prioritized advocacy that focused on COVID-19 recovery that is inclusive for all, such as, advocating for access to technology for low-income Peel residents, and paid sick leave benefits for essential workers who need it. The PPRC, along with several organizations, advocated to the province for paid sick leave for people affected by COVID-19. As a result of these collective efforts, the *COVID-19 Putting Workers First Act, 2021*, came into effect on April 29, 2021.

In addition, the PPRC Co-Chairs met with the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, to discuss the Strategy and to advocate for increased investments for youth in Peel, with a focus on those most vulnerable, particularly racialized, and indigenous youth.

### Next Steps

The work of the PPRC, and the advancement of the outcomes of the Strategy, continue to play a critical role in addressing the immediate and long-term impacts that COVID-19 has had on the most vulnerable populations within the community. Much is still unknown about the full effect the pandemic has had, and will have, on individuals living in poverty. As such, in 2022 PPRC will commence a system's mapping research project with the University of Toronto to identify those barriers and gaps within the systems in Peel that negatively impact individual's abilities to move out of poverty.

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### **APPENDICES**

Appendix I - Poverty in Peel Facts at a Glance 2021

Appendix II - PPRC Financial Literacy Infographic 2020-2021

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