
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

FUNDING FOR HOMELESSNESS OUTREACH

Purpose

Transition Renfrew County's Mental Health, Addictions, and Homelessness Outreach Teams from a locally self-funded pilot to a permanently funded provincial service. We appreciate the Province's collaboration to improve health and wellbeing for vulnerable populations and welcome a strengthened partnership to sustain evidence-based solutions in Renfrew County.

Proposal

The County of Renfrew is requesting the Ministry of Health provide permanent funding for our innovative and high-performing **Mental Health, Addictions, and Homelessness Outreach Teams**, which are part of Mesa, the County's collaborative approach to providing compassionate care in the community. These mobile outreach teams address the complex intersection of homelessness, addiction, and mental and physical health challenges in our rural community.

Our program is modelled similarly to the homelessness outreach programs currently supported by the province and includes integrated care teams consisting of a **Community Paramedic** paired with a **Mental Health or Addictions Specialist**. These teams work in tandem to deliver care and services directly to people where they are – on the streets, in encampments, and in transitional housing – reducing barriers to care and fostering trust with some of the most vulnerable individuals in our region.

We are requesting the Ministry's support to transition this **critical, life-saving initiative** from a self-funded pilot into a **permanently funded provincial service**.

Why this Matters

The County of Renfrew currently operates two multidisciplinary outreach teams that were developed in response to a surge in opioid-related deaths, rising chronic homelessness, and escalating mental health crises across the region.

Each outreach team includes:

- A **Community Paramedic**, trained to address urgent and chronic physical health issues on-site;
- A **Specialist in Mental Health or Addictions**, who provides trauma-informed care, harm reduction supports, and system navigation services.

This model mirrors the province's growing recognition of the need for **interdisciplinary, mobile supports** to combat homelessness and improve health equity, particularly in rural and under-served areas. We believe our program aligns well with the provincial priorities outlined in **Ontario's Roadmap to Wellness**.

The County's outreach teams have already demonstrated significant, measurable success, including:

- A **39% reduction in suspected opioid-related deaths** and a **51% decrease in opioid-related emergency department visits**, driven by proactive harm reduction interventions, **distribution of nearly 700 naloxone kits**, and timely overdose response;
- **Engagement with 277 unique clients** and a total of **4,295 client encounters**, reflecting consistent outreach and follow-up with individuals facing complex health and social challenges;
- **592 successful diversions from 911 calls or emergency room visits**, achieved through early identification and management of untreated physical and mental health conditions – often during outreach encounters – **easing pressure on emergency services** while connecting clients to more appropriate, preventive supports and **reducing the risk of crisis escalation**;
- **Successful engagement and trust-building with individuals historically disconnected from mainstream services**, leading to improved **housing readiness**, **referrals to addiction treatment**, and **coordinated case management** with local housing providers, hospitals, and shelters.

These results are made possible by our **flexible, mobile, and client-centered approach**, which allows us to reach people before their needs escalate into medical emergencies or crisis-level homelessness.

The Need for Permanent Funding

Currently, this model is **funded by the County of Renfrew** as part of Mesa through local levy dollars. While we are proud of our commitment to frontline service innovation, we cannot sustain the growing demand for services and geographic coverage without provincial support.

Permanent funding would:

- Ensure **continuity of care** for highly vulnerable populations;
- Allow for **expansion into additional rural communities** currently underserved by mental health and addiction services;
- Enable better integration with provincially funded systems of care, including public health, housing, and crisis response;
- Provide **staffing stability**, and retain skilled professionals in the field.

The outreach model addresses many of the root causes of homelessness, particularly **unmet health needs**, substance use, and social isolation. Permanent funding is a necessary step in moving from **reactive crisis management** to a **preventive, coordinated provincial homelessness response system**.

By investing in proven, community-based outreach solutions like ours, the Province can make a transformative impact on homelessness, health equity, and public safety – especially in regions where traditional service models have failed to meet demand.

With provincial support, this proven community-based solution can grow to serve more residents, ease pressure on emergency, shelter, and hospital systems and deliver measurable impact across Renfrew County.