

# 2023-2027 Strategic Plan: Growing with Care

Stories of Care

## Where is our community heading?

Thousands of people in Waterloo Region helped us put together a road map for the community, called "Growing with care." It's all about caring for people and the land we share. [Check it out here.](#)

To learn more about how we'll grow with care, scroll below. To hear stories of care in your community, scroll a bit further.

## Homes for all

We will invest in affordable homes and economic opportunity for all that are part of inclusive and environmentally sustainable communities.

Over the coming years we will work together to:

- Move quickly to create affordable, accessible, and equitable housing
- Eliminate chronic homelessness and reliance on traditional shelter models
- Invest in upstream solutions to reduce housing and economic precarity
- Unlock Region-owned land that supports community growth

[Watch a video about our Homes for All Priority Area.](#)

## Equitable services and opportunities

Through collaboration and innovative design, we will provide equitable, accessible services across Waterloo Region that support the social determinants of health, safety and complete communities as we grow.

Over the coming years we will work together to:

- Ensure services are inclusive, accessible, culturally safe and appropriate
- Design equitable Regional services that meet local community needs
- Explore new models of service through community collaboration and partnerships

[Watch a video about our Equitable Services and Opportunities Priority Area.](#)

## Climate aligned growth

As we grow, we will support a healthy environment where communities can thrive. Through intentional collaboration and creativity, we will support sustainable community growth.

Over the coming years we will work together to:

- Use a climate adaptation lens to re-imagine infrastructure, land and services for growth
- Foster car alternative options through complete streets and extended alternative transportation networks
- Steward our natural environment and shared resources as we grow

[Watch a video about our Climate Aligned Growth Priority Area.](#)

## Resilient and future ready organization

The Region of Waterloo is a great place to work, where everyone is valued, feels they belong and where they have the supports and tools they need to do a great job. We will be prepared for the future by providing a safe space for bold ideas and experimentation, based on data and other ways of knowing.

Over the coming years we will work together to:

- Foster an empowered, people-centred culture
- Reconcile past injustices to advance our future together
- Explore new service models and partnerships to achieve fiscal resilience and better service

[Watch a video about our Resilient and Future Ready Organization Priority Area](#)

## Stories from your community

From prolonging the life of our landfill to reimagining paramedic services and investing in children and youth, here's what we worked on in 2023 to make life in Waterloo Region better for you.

### Advancing affordable housing

The Region is prioritizing affordable housing, exceeding milestones in the Building Better Futures plan.

Homes are the foundation to a safe and secure life. The Region is prioritizing affordable homes to support a community where everyone has a place to call home and has access to other community services allowing people to settle, work, and belong.

The Region's affordable housing plan, [Building Better Futures](#), continues to meet and exceed milestones since the initiative began in 2021. In 2023, we now have a total of 2,350 new affordable homes either occupied or in development. This represents an increase of ten times the amount of affordable homes developed compared to previous years (500 homes per year versus 50).

### Building Better Futures Overview

2,350 total new homes.

1,043 new homes in development, of which 195 are supportive homes.

1,307 new homes occupied, of which 301 are supportive homes.

Read about the projects below:

#### 825 King Street, Indwell project with St. Mark's Lutheran Church

This Indwell project with St. Mark's Lutheran Church created 43 new affordable supportive homes in our community. Keeping the existing exterior, including the stained glass windows, maintains the look of the building while ushering it into a new era. These new supportive homes were occupied at the end of 2023.

[Watch a video about this project.](#)

Supportive homes are an important part of the affordable housing landscape, providing supports and services to folks who need them to remain housed. Building Better Futures has added 301 new supportive homes, and 195 more are currently in development.

Two additional churches in downtown Kitchener announced redevelopment of their sites for affordable housing in 2023. St. Peter's Lutheran Church and their non-profit partner, Indwell, will convert unused space in their facility to 41 affordable housing units with expected occupancy in 2024. Historic Saint Paul's Lutheran Church started construction on 36 one-bedroom units targeted to low-income seniors who are in need of affordable housing.

### 33 Front St., St. Jacobs, Sprucelawn Apartments

With the need for affordable housing growing in the community, Building Better Futures projects span across the region. Sprucelawn Apartments is an affordable housing build in St. Jacob's, Woolwich Township, and is designed for older adults aged 60 plus.

Sprucelawn added 28 new homes that are now occupied.

### 420 Kingscourt Drive, Waterloo Region Housing

A new building is being constructed on the same site as an existing Waterloo Region Housing building at 416 Kingscourt Drive. This will add 73 new homes, ranging from one to five bedrooms. The project will also include three new amenity spaces, which will be available to residents in both 416 and 420 Kingscourt Drive. The project is expected to be completed in February 2025.

### K-W Urban Native Wigwam Project (KWUNWP) project, 27 Cambridge Street, Cambridge

This project by K-W Urban Native Wigwam Project will create 30 new affordable housing units to serve Indigenous community members. A total of 16 units will be dedicated specifically to Indigenous women and their children. Occupancy is anticipated in May 2024.

### K-W Urban Native Wigwam Project (KWUNWP) transitional housing development, 34 Bridgeport Road East, Waterloo

Urban Native Transitional Housing is an Indigenous Led Housing Program that helps Indigenous people transition from temporary housing, to permanent housing. It focuses on assisting those living unhoused with culturally relevant supports while they secure permanent housing. This location opened in August 2023.

## Surplus lands

Another important component of the Building Better Futures plan is creating innovative ways to get more affordable homes built. One way the Region is achieving this is through the use of surplus lands. To date, the Region has identified three surplus sites that will be used for affordable housing. These sites include 30 Lauris Avenue in Cambridge, 1388 Highland Road West in Kitchener and 41 Westhill Drive, Waterloo.

## National Housing Day

The Region of Waterloo hosted an event in Cambridge for National Housing Day last year. National Housing day is on November 22, and is a day recognized across Canada to highlight the importance of access to housing. At the event, the Region highlighted individuals and groups who have gone above and beyond to support community members to achieve their housing goals and improve their quality of life.

This year's theme was Homes for all: a portrait of the housing continuum. The event featured keynote speakers, a speaker's panel, awards, and networking opportunities that included community organizations and partners discussing the housing continuum and possible solutions.

## YKF: The fastest growing airport in Canada

The Region of Waterloo International Airport continues to soar.

Airports are special places. Gateways of excitement and anticipation, connecting us to family, friends and adventures around the World - they're also the familiar "welcome home" mat when we return from our travels, a little bit tired and missing our own bed.

In Waterloo Region, our airport is also the place where over 500 people build their careers and is an ecosystem of aviation and aerospace industry. YKF is an important engine of Waterloo Region's economy and new opportunities are always being explored to support the thriving and diverse economy our community needs as we grow.

Region of Waterloo International Airport has had a BIG year.

### Looking back through the calendar, here's just a few of the highlights:

YKF launched a newly constructed baggage system that can now process up to 400 bags per hour.

We installed new public art in the recently opened departure lounge and baggage claim by Sherry Czekus, James Nye and Amber Pacheco and Ernest Daetwyler

Sherry Czekus

Crossing with the Light, 2019;  
Pedestrians Crossing #1, 2015;  
Otherwise Occupied, 2019

James Nye and Amber Pacheco

Memory and the Temporal Exchange

Ernest Daetwyler

The Wall of Nightmares and Dreams

We partnered with Stockyards, a brand-new food and beverage provider for the departure lounge (opening Spring 2024!)

Celebrated new airline routes with Flair Airlines — Las Vegas and St. John's Newfoundland.

Continue to collaborate with the Waterloo Institute for Sustainable Aeronautics! WISA has a mission to become the world's leading hub for sustainable aeronautical research, technology and education and we're proud to partner with Dr. Suzanne Kearns and her team to bring sustainability to life.

### Tenants at YKF have also had an exciting year.

Waterloo Wellington Flight Centre announced a new flight simulation centre and innovation hub to expand their training capabilities. Amid a global pilot shortage, WWFC is able to train 300+ pilots a year at YKF.

Chartright Air Group opened their newest facility, Hangar 64, a state-of-the-art facility that expands their private charter operation to continue to serve Waterloo Region.

The biggest accomplishment of 2023?

445,312 passengers travelled through YKF. 350,000 more people than in 2019!

But it's more than a number. We're talking about 445,312 people travelling through YKF to make memories and connect with the family, friends and places that matter most.

445,312 people visiting their grandparents, attending their best friend's wedding, going on a much-needed getaway, going to close that game-changing deal, seeing a loved one before they passed away, hiking that trail on their bucket list, checking out the school at the top of their list or visiting their long-distance love.

Looking ahead, YKF is heading into another exciting year. A refreshed Airport Master Plan will help guide the future of the airport as it climbs towards one million passengers annually over the next five years and a renewed focus on sustainability and providing Waterloo Region residents with easy, comfortable and convenient travel options.

Follow along with all the YKF 2024 adventures and announcements here: @FLYYKF

## Improving the wellbeing of people living with dementia

Sunnyside Home receives Butterfly Accreditation for their innovative approach to care.

Relationships matter.

They give us a sense of purpose and feeling of welcome we cannot find anywhere else. And they are what the Butterfly approach at Sunnyside Home is all about — creating relationships where all who live there feel like they belong, their contributions and gifts matter, and they are at home.

Sunnyside Home is a long-term care home owned and operated by the Region of Waterloo in Kitchener. Here, 263 residents are part of a vibrant community on a campus with services for older adults. The grounds have gardens, walkways, community spaces and courtyards to enjoy.

Sunnyside Home is the first long-term care home in Waterloo Region to be accredited the Butterfly Approach®.

[Watch a video about how relationships and purpose matter at Sunnyside Home.](#)

There are two houses at Sunnyside using The Butterfly Approach®: Buttonworks and Laurel Creek.

The Buttonworks and Laurel Creek areas feel like home and evidence of meaningful relationships can be witnessed daily among both people living in the home and the team members.

[Watch a video about how Sunnyside Home makes spaces and places feel like home.](#)

[Watch a video about how we work with residents and families to design the best possible services.](#)

[Watch a video about how employees use innovative approaches to deliver excellent services.](#)

Here's what our families had to say:

“She used to be a nurse, so she does not think she is confined to a care home, but that she is at work. The staff treat her more like a colleague and when she is in the common area, she is on shift. No one bursts her bubbles and involves her as much as they can.”

“When you look at the people living here, you can see it in their eyes, you can see light in their eyes, you can tell they heard me speaking to them and they are happy to be included.”

“I always feel included and welcomed, with everyone there, whoever it is, the team will go the extra mile ...”

## Working to Improve Neighbourhood Safety

WINS is a peer-based needle recovery and harm reduction outreach program.

For the past five years, Working to Improve Neighbourhood Safety (WINS) has been working to dispose of improperly discarded needles and support people that use substances in Waterloo Region.

The WINS Program is operated by Sanguen Health Centre in partnership with Region of Waterloo Public Health and the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo.

### How does it work?

WINS hires and trains people who have lived and living experience with substance use to safely dispose of discarded harm reduction supplies (such as used needles and glass pipes).

These individuals often face barriers to traditional employment.

[Watch this video about the WINS program.](#)

54 peer workers

478 average hours each month worked by peer workers

2541 needles collected each month

787 glass pipes collected each month

Peer workers are trusted sources of information and support many individuals in the community, including local businesses and individuals who use substances. They provide



resources and harm reduction supplies, education on safe disposal and facilitate connections and referrals to local support organizations.

1360 harm reduction supplies distributed each month

22 sharps disposal containers distributed each month

31 referrals to community organizations each month

The collaboration, outreach and peer-led support in the WINS program has created a successful roadmap to provide accessible and equitable services that impact individual and community health.

More information on the WINS program, safe sharps disposal and other community health initiatives:

[Safe Sharps Disposal](#)

[Consumption and Treatment Services](#)

[Public Health Neighbourhood Nursing](#)

[Public Health Peer Health Workers](#)

[Warming and Cooling Centres](#)

## Children and youth in Waterloo Region

Cultivating belonging and wellbeing in our youngest residents.

There's nothing better than feeling like you're right where you're supposed to be. Whether that's a moment in time, a physical location, or that feeling of connection with your family, friends, and local community — that feeling of belonging is important to our wellbeing.

Finding ways for children and youth to connect to their community and experience belonging is more critical than ever. This has led the Region of Waterloo to explore new ways of making services more equitable and to work alongside youth in addressing the community's most pressing needs.

Scroll through to find out more about a few of the programs that made their debut or grew in 2023:

## Early Learning and Child Care Navigators

The Region is finding new ways to help families find the supports and connections they need.

Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Navigator roles are funded by the Region's Equity Diversity and Inclusion Fund, and administered by the YMCA of Three Rivers. These positions were developed in response to the community's need to improve equitable access within Early Learning and Child Care services for Black, Indigenous, and racialized individuals.

Navigators provide support for families with children under the age of six. They assist families with navigating the various supports, subsidies, and child care options in the community.

Languages ELCC Navigators can support families in include: English, Polish, Ukranian, Serbian, French, ASL/CSL, Urdu and Hindi.

[Watch this video to learn more about Early Learning and Childcare Navigators in Waterloo Region.](#)

## Language and Mentorship Program

The Region of Waterloo is continuing to improve equity in child care and creating career opportunities for caregivers speaking diverse languages.

The Language and Mentorship Program (LAMP) allows caregivers who are representative of our diverse linguistic community to contract with the Region's Licensed Home Child Care program to provide quality child care in their home. The program is designed for Caregivers that have lower levels of English - they receive support from interpreters and mentors and focus on providing care to children from their language community. Caregivers in the LAMP program are supported to continue with their English language learning, and receive interpretation until no longer required.

## Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab

Working alongside children and youth to make our community better for everyone.

Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab was established in 2021 with the goal to make Waterloo Region the best community for children and youth.

This past year, SWRIL supported a variety of youth-led experiments and projects, like [youth-led gardens](#) , an [innovation curriculum for youth ideas in schools](#) , and tools like an AI chat bot to address problems youth have identified in the community!

## Nurture Program

[Watch a video about the Nurture Program.](#)

## GIMI Impact

[Watch a video about GIMI Impact.](#)

In November, United Way Waterloo Region Communities (United Way WRC) announced an investment of \$100,000 for Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab (SWRIL) to deliver training to community organizations that serve children, youth, and families!

This important training helps to develop a community-wide framework that supports youth innovation and fund youth-led projects – with the goal to improve child and youth well-being.

We can't wait to see what amazing projects come in 2024 and beyond!

This collection of innovative programs and services are just a few ways we're working together with our community to help children and youth thrive.

## The Upstreamers

Meet the changemakers using Upstream Funding to transform the community for the better.

Waterloo Region is home to incredible community organizers, advocates and leaders who spend every day working to create a community where everyone belongs and can thrive.

In 2022, the Region launched the [Upstream Fund](#) with the transformational intent of shifting power and resources to the community. By centering community voices, we are creating a Region where everyone knows they are welcome and valued.

At the core of this project are changemakers. Together they are improving lives by addressing root causes to some of the biggest issues/ or challenges facing our community today. Thanks to their collective efforts, we are seeing incredible change.

As the project has grown, many recipients have started referring to themselves as Upstreamers.

## Meet the Upstreamers

*Meet the Upstreamers-Chantal*

[Watch a video about Young City Growers.](#)

The work of Upstreamers is vast and varied — to date 74 different organizations in both rural and urban communities have received funding to tackle issues like Reconciliation, accessibility, anti-hate, inclusive spaces, employment skills, mental health, and so much more.

By design, and flowing from the [Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan](#), the Upstream Fund has been centering First Nations, Inuit and Métis, African, Caribbean and Black-identifying, racialized, and other communities who continue to face systemic barriers and discrimination. Because of this, Upstreamers are collectively creating a ripple effect to improve wellbeing and create a community where everyone belongs.

*Meet the Upstreamers-Dan*

[Watch a video about Independent Living Waterloo Region.](#)

In 2024 the Upstream Fund will open applications for the third time. Creating lasting change takes time, and so much has happened in just under two years.

As the Region grows with care, it is clear the Upstreamers are not just prepared for, but welcome change.

The Upstream Fund is one of the ways the Region is using community collaboration to create more equitable access to services and opportunities.

*Meet the Upstreamers-Rosslyn and Kristine*

[Watch this video about the Woolwich Community Health Centre and the Engage Rural upstream project.](#)

Whether you want to be part of the change, or follow the journey, stay tuned to [our page](#) for updates on this incredible initiative and the Upstreamers making it happen.

## Shared stories of strength and survival

McDougall Cottage explores “Resiliency”.

If you've never been to McDougall Cottage, you might be surprised by what you'll find at this quaint granite and limestone cottage set along the Grand River - an active hub for community events, intimate gatherings like weddings and celebrations of life, workshops and wonderful themed afternoon teas. As soon as you open the front door, you'll feel the welcoming energy of the cottage and the individuals who continue to tell its ever-evolving story.

Interact with engaging exhibits, and peer out the window at the ever-evolving neighbourhood of the downtown Cambridge historic factory district.

Although you wouldn't know it today, decades ago the Cottage had fallen into a state of disrepair. Overgrown with vegetation, crumbling plaster and broken windows, it took time and commitment to bring the Cottage back to vibrancy.

In 2022, the team at McDougall Cottage decided to explore the idea of developing an exhibit on the topic of mental health, using the Cottage as a metaphor for Resiliency.

The exhibit featured a multimedia journey of shared personal stories of resiliency and offered resources and strategies to help the community bounce back from life's challenges. There are options when building one's resiliency, but it's not a one size fits all solution. Resiliency gave guests a chance to explore options that resonated with them.

A message wall invited guests to leave notes of encouragement for other visitors who may have been experiencing difficult times.

Through partnerships with local organizations like Canadian Mental Health Association of Waterloo Wellington and local wellness experts, the Cottage was able to offer programs, virtual talks, workshops and informal gatherings on mindfulness, forest therapy and much more.

[Watch this video about resiliency and recovery](#)

[Watch this video about sharing hope and light](#)

[Watch this video about using our lived experience as an asset](#)

Resiliency also represents the next step in McDougall Cottage's future direction to explore and embrace new and innovative ways to tell stories. In fact, across the Region of Waterloo Museums you'll find a collection of ever-evolving exhibits, programs and events that raise community voices, explore diverse experiences, celebrate cultures, and share traditions of people who have lived here before and those that do so today. And, it's this coming together that gives our community strength. That builds our resiliency.

## Over 25 million riders rely on GRT in 2023

Service boosted to meet record-setting demand

Each morning you get up, make coffee, brave the weather, rush off to daycare or work, to appointments or to connect with friends and family. We do too. We're up early, making sure your bus is ready to meet you at your bus stop, and get you on your way.

In 2023, more people than ever chose transit. They chose a more sustainable transportation option.

From January to December, total boardings exceeded 25 million.

Total boardings up 3 million since 2019.

In September, an increase of customers meant GRT's bus garages were emptied out as every available bus was used to transport a record number of customers.

To answer the unprecedented demand, GRT used feedback from staff and customers, as well as bus and train customer counts to come up with a plan to increase service where it was needed most. GRT also worked to graduate more operators and increase the number of vehicles available each day.

After extensive community consultation, service was also expanded in Cambridge in September. The changes brought enhanced connectivity for residents across the city.

Transit riders are now able to get around Cambridge and the rest of Waterloo Region more efficiently with GRT's [reorganized and expanded routes](#).

In 2024, GRT will be adding over 50,000 hours of new service to meet the record-setting demand.

To keep the community moving, GRT is also working on business plans for conventional and MobilityPLUS services, which will guide growth into the future.

## Building a sustainable community

Extending the life of the landfill and powering homes.

When you throw something away, you may think it's gone into the land of waste, never to be seen again. Sometimes it is – but sometimes it takes a lot longer than you think to

decompose or break down. Even a newspaper from the '70s is still in tact after being buried in the landfill for 50 years.

[Watch this video about our landfill](#) and rethinking what we throw away.

The Region supports a healthy environment where communities can thrive. To do this, we manage the impacts of waste on the environment every day and continue to innovate. In 2023, we began building one of the last four cells at our Waterloo landfill site. A cell is a large hole dug into the ground that holds your waste. It is constructed with an engineered liner to protect the groundwater, surface water, and air we breathe. The following video explains how the cell works.

[Watch this video that describes what is a landfill.](#)

[Meet the team of engineers who led the work on the new cell.](#)

They keep track of how much waste gets deposited over the years and make decisions together on when new cells are needed.

[Watch this video about how we design and manage our landfill.](#)

The cell is designed with a special engineered lining to ensure liquids and gases generated by your decomposing waste do not escape. Not only do we trap it — we convert the gas — a greenhouse gas, to renewable energy.

Gas from our Waterloo landfill powers up to six thousand homes a year; and even to this day, with our Cambridge landfill now closed, the gas collected there is still used to help power a steel recycling plant next door!

The space at our landfill is finite. In less than 25 years, it will be full and will need to close. We're planning for how to extend the life of it even further.

That's where you come in.

Here's a look at how far we have come since 2016 when we moved from collecting waste every week to every two weeks.

Curbside collection changes since 2016:

- 172% increase in green bin waste
- 55% increase in recycling
- 36% increase in yard waste
- 26% decrease in garbage

The most recent data (2022) shows 64 per cent of waste generated by residents in Waterloo Region is diverted from the landfill, one of the highest rates in the province.

While residents in Waterloo Region generate about 42 per cent of the waste that gets sent to the landfill; business and industry generate about 58 per cent.

## The community is doing its part, and we can all do more.

We have our familiar 3Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

The Region has added Recover — converting greenhouse gas to renewable energy.

Residents can also think about Refuse — which means changing what they buy because the packaging is not recyclable or re-usable.

The next time you're throwing something away, take a second to ask:

Is this waste?

Is it recyclable?

Should it go in the green bin?

Two seconds of your time can help extend the life of our landfill for generations to come.

## Community on board with e-bikes and e-scooters

Shared program provides new sustainable transportation option in Waterloo Region.

In 2018 the community set a goal to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by 80% by 2050. Each of us has a role to play in our shared goal. However, our 2023 GHG Inventory report shows that our collective transportation is the largest contributor to our Region's overall community GHG emissions at 47- 49%.

So we got creative.

In 2023, Waterloo Region launched a network of shared e-bikes and e-scooters across Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo.

The program provided a new, environmentally sustainable travel choice for the community that helped us reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Created through a partnership between Neuron Mobility, the Region and Cities, the network ran through the downtown cores of all three cities, linking with transit stops and stations to connect to Grand River Transit's buses and trains.



Hundreds of e-scooters and e-bikes were available for residents on a daily basis.

The program injected an estimated \$8.2 million into the Waterloo region economy.

46,000 riders

190,000 trips

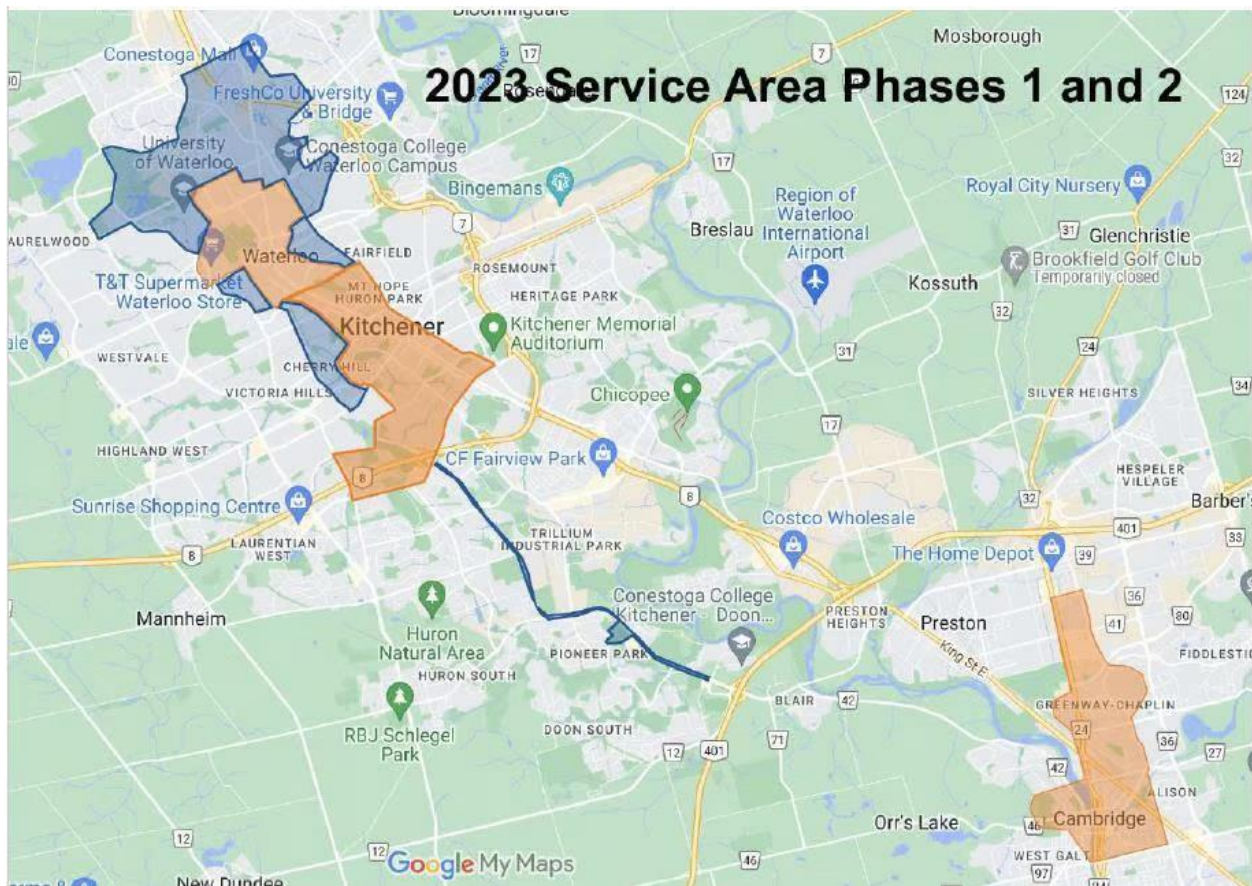
360,000 kms

From April to October, nearly 46,000 people took 190,000 rides, travelling over 360,000 kilometres by e-scooter and e-bike. That's roughly the equivalent of crossing Canada from coast to coast, 65 times.

As a result, the community prevented over 12 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, the equivalent of roughly 192 mature trees.

37% of trips started or ended at transit stops or stations.

The program will return in 2024, and expansion is planned for future years.



The areas in orange represent the initial service area at the time of launch, with the areas in blue showing the expansions to the service area that occurred over the 2023 riding season.

The shared e-bike and e-scooter program helps the Region of Waterloo achieve its climate change goals, supports multi-modal transportation, and contributes to an interconnected transportation network for the whole community to enjoy.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### *Wondering how to get started?*

Riders can download Neuron Mobility's mobile app from the App Store or Google Play and get set up to ride in a matter of minutes. Here are some commonly-asked questions:

### *Do I need a helmet?*

E-scooter and e-bike riders must wear a helmet. All Neuron vehicles are equipped with adjustable helmets that are unlocked through the Neuron app. You can also use your own helmet.

### *Is there an age limit?*

Riders must be 16 years or older. Riders under 18 must have guardian consent.

### *Can I have a passenger?*

Only one rider is allowed per e-scooter or e-bike at a time.

### *How much does it cost?*

There is a pay-per-ride option, paid with the Neuron app. The rate is \$1.15 + \$0.35 per minute, plus tax. For people using more frequently, there are also 3-Day, Weekly and Monthly Pass options with flat rates as low as \$3.73 per day.

### *Where can I find an e-scooter or e-bike?*

The app can also be used to locate available vehicles. The program first rolled out in the downtown areas of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, and near transit stations.

### *What if I've never ridden an e-scooter or e-bike before?*

You can learn about safely riding e-scooters at the Scoot Safe website. Choose "Waterloo Region" as your community for free videos and quizzes to help prepare you for your first scooter journey, or just to refresh your knowledge.

More safety information can be found at [GRT's Cycle and Walk webpage](#).

## Advancing Truth and Reconciliation

Paula Whitlow shapes our path forward as the first Director of Truth and Reconciliation.

[Watch a video about Paula speaking about her home Six Nations of the Grand River](#) aka Ohsweken, being Wolf Clan from the Mohawk Nation, and how she feels most like herself cozy at home with her family.

In September 2022, the Region hired it's first Director, Truth and Reconciliation, Paula Whitlow.

To meaningfully advance our future, we must acknowledge and learn from our past injustices, and act. Truth and Reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples is central to this.

“I came into the job with ‘the sky’s the limit’ approach, so I didn’t see anything that was ‘off limits’ so to speak. My approach is to be honest and authentic and continue on a path forward.”

“One of my proudest achievements has been building lasting relationships based on mutual respect, reminiscent of the two-row wampum and dish with one spoon. These relationships are not just professional courtesies; they are deep, respectful friendships with a promise of permanence.”

[Watch about the importance of building relationships to address the Calls to Action.](#)

The Two Row Wampum originated from 1613 as a covenant between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch settlers. It symbolizes two parallel paths: one for Indigenous Peoples and the other for settlers, each maintaining their own traditions and governance while coexisting in peace with mutual respect. At the Region of Waterloo, we work to honour the Two Row Wampum treaty and its principles of Friendship, Peace Between Peoples, and Living In Parallel Forever. All of us are needed to build the community our future generations deserve.

The term Dish with One Spoon represents a commitment to peaceably share and care for the same lands and resources. It emphasizes the principle of taking only what one needs, leaving enough for others, and ensuring no violence or conflict.

It's been eight years since the Calls to Action were released, and in those eight years, only eight Calls to Action have been completed. Despite Canada's claim that the Calls to Action

are a priority, the reality is Indigenous peoples in Canada continue to experience more inequities than ever before. Awareness of the larger picture is important.

As we focus on advancing the Calls to Action in the Region, we are aligning this work with our newly released Strategic Plan: Growing with Care. As the Region grows, we will continue to influence more holistic thinking and actions.

[Watch a video about how the Region is working to advance the calls to action.](#)

The journey to Truth and Reconciliation is not easy, or simple — there are challenges but there is also beauty.

Introducing [Indigenous ways of knowing into all that the Region](#) does is a benefit to the entire community. Having a leader who [works collaboratively](#) and does not shy away from difficult paths that need to be taken is already making all the difference.

Learn more about how the Region is addressing [Truth and Reconciliation](#).

## Working smarter, saving money

At the Region, we work in creative, innovative ways to give you better service and prepare for growth

We understand that the cost of living continues to go up for residents and we continually aim to use every tax dollar wisely. Since 2019, the Region has found operating budget savings of \$40.5 million.

Our teams worked on a large scale, to work smarter and more efficiently for the whole community in 2023. This included exploring creative and innovative ways to give you better service and to prepare the community for future growth.

We minimized our footprint on the community in square footage and emissions, reducing the amount of office space we use by 41,774 square feet.

That's the equivalent of three Olympic-size swimming pools!

This saves \$1.2 million tax dollars a year in leasing and operating costs.

Reducing our footprint is made possible through hybrid work, shared workstations, and tools. Together these give teams greater flexibility and more opportunities to connect, collaborate and co-create.

By optimizing our space, we can expand our services to meet the needs of a growing community without the need for more administrative space in the foreseeable future.

This defers about \$100+ million tax dollars in costs over 20 years and aligns with our climate goals to be more energy efficient and reduce our carbon footprint.

In 2023, we added more ways for people to interact with us so that they can get the services and information they need in the way that's most convenient for them. In addition to phone and in-person chats, people can now chat with us online.

The Chatbot is an online chat box on our website that answers questions about our services.

If you need more information or if the Chatbot is unable to answer, you can connect with a live agent.

“Great experience and very quick”

“Agent was extremely helpful and showed a lot of professionalism and patience to answer all questions”

“Keep up the good work.”

Currently the Chatbot can respond to common questions about public transit, waste, Provincial Offences, and airport arrivals and departures. It will expand to other areas over time. We continue to train our Chatbot to adapt and evolve to how residents interact with it. Thank you for your feedback as we continue to improve service and better meet your needs in 2024!

112,000+ messages sent between residents, the bot and our live agents.

Average of 51 interactions a day.

85% agree or strongly agree that they were satisfied with their chat with a live agent.

## Paramedics' innovative solutions to ensure timely patient care

Ensuring the community has access to timely and appropriate medical care is a top priority for Region of Waterloo paramedics.

In 2023, Paramedic Services added four new ambulances and hired 20 new paramedics to ensure residents in this growing community continue to receive excellent care.

But keeping paramedics on the road isn't the only work being done to meet the needs of our region's aging and growing population. Paramedic Services leaders have been working with the province and local partners to reimagine how services are delivered. A variety of creative solutions have been implemented to connect patients with the care they need in a timely way.

[Watch a video from Chief Riches about the Region of Waterloo's Paramedic Services.](#)

Scroll below to learn about paramedic initiatives.

### Designated offload nursing program

In partnership with the region's three hospitals, Region of Waterloo Paramedics was awarded \$1,694,000 in provincial funding to continue to grow and implement the Designated Offload Nursing Programs.

Designated offload nurses focus on the successful transfer of patients from paramedics to the hospital emergency departments. The program is intended to free up ambulances and paramedics to return to communities as soon as possible to provide more people with access to timely emergency care.

This one-time funding supports an increase of designated offload nurse coverage in each of the three regional hospital's emergency departments to 24 hours a day, seven days a week until March 31, 2024.

### Fit2Sit

A Fit2Sit program was implemented in partnership with local hospitals in fall 2023. Fit2Sit places eligible patients directly in emergency room waiting rooms after paramedics have determined their condition is stable enough that they can wait for hospital care without paramedic assistance. Once the patient has been designated as Fit2Sit, the paramedics can then return to the road for their next call.

555 patients have qualified for Fit2Sit since the program was implemented on September 15, 2023.

### Treat and discharge

As of December 1, 2023, Region of Waterloo Paramedics can treat patients on-scene for certain conditions. Paramedics who have received special treat and discharge training can

use this new patient care model in appropriate situations when responding to seizures, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) and tachydysrhythmia (heartbeat rate of more than 100 beats per minute).

If a patient meets the appropriate conditions, the paramedic can attend to their needs and provide a recommendation to the patient for follow-up care. This keeps lower-risk patients out of the hospital and allows paramedics to return to the road.

## Community paramedicine

The community paramedicine program assists people living with chronic illness or ongoing health needs, who may otherwise not have easy access to health care support. The program helps to address the health needs of residents in their homes, outside of the emergency system.

[Watch this video to learn more about the Community Paramedicine Program.](#)

Specially trained community paramedics visit individuals who are registered with the program for scheduled checkups, health assessments and in-home safety assessments. They can help patients connect with appropriate community services.

The community paramedicine program also provides palliative care services to individuals registered with Home and Community Care Services Waterloo Wellington.

*Number of program clients for 2023:*

230 Community paramedicine clients

398 Paramedics providing palliative care

## Creating pathways to patient care outside of the emergency room

Alternate destinations are health care locations where eligible patients may be brought by paramedics for their treatment. These locations can best support the unique needs of these individuals and help divert patients away from hospital emergency rooms. Region of Waterloo Paramedic Services is working closely with partners across the community to develop alternate destination pathways for those needing support with mental health and addiction concerns, and palliative patients requiring hospice care.

### *Hospice care*

The Ministry of Health approved Region of Waterloo Paramedic Services to provide alternate destination services for eligible palliative care and end-of-life patients in August 2023. This means if a patient registered with a local hospice calls 911, the paramedics will be alerted to this. They will assess if it is beneficial for the patient to be transported to hospice instead of to the hospital. This initiative will launch in 2024 and supports the commitment to providing the right care in the right place for patients.

### *Mental health and addiction clinics*

In spring 2023, Paramedic Services participated in a pilot Community Mental Health and Addictions Clinic at Cambridge Memorial Hospital. The pilot was run by the Cambridge North Dumfries Ontario Health Team and helped divert 23 people from the emergency department to the clinic, where they received patient focused care.

Paramedic Services is supporting the work to build permanent mental health and addiction clinics in both Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo. Upon Ministry of Health approval, these clinics can serve as alternate destinations for eligible patients. For more information on this work visit the [Alternate Destination Clinics for Mental Health and Addiction Engage page](#).