



**Re: Letter of Endorsement**

December 3, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing to express our strong support for the proposed pilot project, "*Welcoming Streets*," a collaborative initiative led by Positive Living Niagara and REACH Niagara (Regional Essential Access to Connected Healthcare).

REACH Niagara is committed to supporting the equity-deserving population of Niagara. Using a collaborative approach, REACH delivers comprehensive care and essential services directly to shelters, food banks, domestic violence shelters, and other community organizations through its health clinics. Our proactive efforts aim to improve health and housing outcomes for those we serve.

Because of our existing network of community partnerships including Positive Living Niagara, REACH Niagara is uniquely positioned to be able to support the "*Welcoming Streets*" program. REACH Niagara will ensure that the connected supports provided through the proposed program will include holistic primary care, counselling and system navigation.

In recent months, safety concerns regarding the homeless population in St. Catharines have escalated, highlighting a growing divide between the general public and the unhoused community. This rift has led to further isolation and marginalization of those experiencing homelessness, exacerbating the social imbalance within our city. The "*Welcoming Streets*" initiative represents a vital opportunity to break down these barriers and challenge the negative stigmas that contribute to the alienation of this vulnerable group. We understand this pilot is the first of its kind in Niagara where through evaluation efforts has the potential to be expanded to other communities and fill a critical gap.

The model proposed for this project, which has proven successful in other Canadian cities, takes a unique peer-led approach to community engagement and redevelopment. This strategy focuses on fostering accountability and building connections on the streets, with the ultimate goal of linking more individuals from equity-deserving communities to essential services and making public spaces safe for everyone who uses them.

Moreover, the implementation of this program has the potential to alleviate some of the fiscal strain currently placed on regional and municipal first responders. Peer-led interventions have been shown to be more effective in addressing the needs of the homeless population, particularly in building trust with individuals who may harbor skepticism or fear toward law enforcement and other first response agencies.



The board of REACH Niagara wholeheartedly supports this joint proposal from Positive Living Niagara and REACH Niagara, and we offer our full endorsement of the "*Welcoming Streets*" project.

Thank you for considering this important initiative.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Ruberto", is written over a faint, light blue circular watermark that matches the REACH Niagara logo.

Frank Ruberto  
Board Chair, REACH Niagara