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**MEMORANDUM**

**COM-C 1-2021**

**Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Community Services**

**Date: January 12, 2021**

**To: Public Health & Social Services Committee**

**From: Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services**

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This memo provides continued updates on the measures Community Services has taken to ensure the ongoing delivery of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the alternate approaches used to support those most vulnerable in Niagara.

**Seniors Services – Long-Term Care**

**Long-Term Care COVID-19 Outbreak Updates**

The increased community spread of COVID-19 continues to pose a heightened risk for long-term care (LTC) homes and congregate settings during this second wave of the pandemic.

In the last report, Seniors Services reported an ongoing outbreak at the Meadows of Dorchester and Gilmore Lodge. Both of these outbreaks posed a significant challenge with high numbers of staff required to isolate due to possible risk of transmission. The Meadows of Dorchester outbreak was declared over on December 12, 2020 and the Gilmore Lodge outbreak was declared over on December 23, 2020.

Early on during these two highly contagious outbreaks, Seniors Services changed a practice around the use of personal protection equipment (PPE) to help prevent and decrease the number of staff requiring to be isolated due to exposure of COVID-19. Prior to these outbreaks, universal masking was practiced for all staff and full PPE (mask, shield, gloves, and gown) were used when entering any isolation rooms. Through the Meadows of Dorchester and Gilmore Lodge outbreaks, Seniors Services identified that despite these infection prevention measures, staff continued to have some risk of exposure to COVID-19 when they were working with residents and / or

staff who had not yet become symptomatic. The period of communicability for COVID-19 includes the 48-hours prior to symptom onset, which meant that essentially, any staff who had worked with a positive resident or staff member in the 48-hours prior to symptom development were therefore required to be off for two weeks despite universal masking and full PPE protocols. This was occurring due to the identification that a possible mode of transmission of COVID-19 was through people's eyes. To mitigate for this risk, Seniors Services implemented a universal eye protection practice to further decrease the risk of COVID-19 transmission across all eight homes and in assisted living as well. This change in practice has been well received by staff, and Seniors Services has also shared this practice with other LTC home operators.

Seniors Services also reported on two new declared outbreaks at Rapelje Lodge and the Woodlands of Sunset in the last report. Both outbreaks were triggered by a single positive employee test result identified through weekly staff surveillance testing. Both of these cases were linked to community spread. The two outbreaks started after the implementation of universal eye protection, and neither home had any transmission of the virus. The outbreak at Rapelje Lodge was declared over on December 7, 2020 and the outbreak at the Woodlands of Sunset was declared over on December 18, 2020.

At the time of writing this report there are three active outbreaks in three of the Regionally operated LTC homes and one in the assisted living facility.

Meadows of Dorchester – An outbreak of COVID-19 was declared on December 20, 2020, when an essential caregiver tested positive for the virus. All required outbreak measures were promptly implemented. There has been no further transmission of the virus in the home.

Woodlands of Sunset – A declared outbreak was triggered on December 25, 2020, when weekly surveillance testing of staff identified a positive test result for one employee. All required outbreak measures were promptly implemented and the employee is in isolation. There has been no further transmission of the virus in the home.

Linhaven – A declared outbreak was triggered on January 2, 2021, when weekly surveillance testing of staff identified positive test results for three employees. All required outbreak measures were promptly implemented and the employees are in isolation. There has been no further transmission of the virus in the home.

Deer Park Suites (assisted living) – A declared outbreak was triggered on December 16, 2020, when a client tested positive for COVID-19. All required outbreak measures were promptly implemented. A week later two staff also tested positive for COVID-19, and the results appear to be unrelated cases linked to community transmission, rather than transmission of the virus within the assisted living facility. Both of these staff members are in isolation.

### **Vaccine Distribution Planning and Implementation**

Health Canada has approved both the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine as well as the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine has been identified for use with priority populations including residents, staff, and essential caregivers at LTC homes, retirement homes and assisted living facilities. As there are many logistical challenges with the delivery of this vaccine, the identified priority staffing groups will be vaccinated at the Niagara Health St. Catharines site. Niagara Health is working in collaboration with Niagara Region Public Health to roll out a vaccination distribution plan. The vaccine is expected to be available in Niagara in early January 2021.

The Moderna vaccine has also been identified for use with priority populations including residents, staff, and essential caregivers at LTC homes, retirement homes and assisted living facilities (co-located with LTC sites). It is expected that the administration of this vaccine will be done by the operators on-site (similar to how the flu vaccine is administered). LTC homes are in the process of finalizing vaccine clinic planning for the residents.

### **Homelessness Services & Community Engagement**

Homelessness Services continues to operate the full emergency shelter system, overflow hotel rooms, the self-isolation facility and an enhanced street outreach service. As of December 28, 2020, 345 individuals have been referred to the isolation facility with testing administered in shelter.

Niagara Region has been advised that the Region will receive \$4,068,100 in Social Service Relief (SSRF) - Hold Back Funding. This is in addition to the approximately \$3 million that was received through SSRF Phase 2 funding, announced in October of 2020, the majority of which is being used for the Bridge Housing project in Niagara Falls. The Region is awaiting further details on funding guidelines for the SSRF – Hold Back Funding in order to determine allowable expenditures. It is assumed that the funding guidelines will be similar to that of the SSRF Phase 2 funding allocation,

meaning that funding can be used for operating costs associated with the needs of the homelessness system until March 31, 2021, and can also be used for capital costs to support projects with completion (and occupancy) committed by the end of December 2021. Given these very tight timelines, Community Services staff will be working over the next couple of weeks to identify strategies to maximize the benefit of these funds and ensure that any identified strategies are in alignment with funding requirements.

### **Children's Services**

Due to the province-wide lockdown that was announced on December 26, 2020, Children's Services has had to adapt how child care is provided to kindergarten and school aged children in Niagara. While child care will continue to be provided for families of infants, toddlers and preschool aged children throughout the lockdown, only school aged children of essential workers, as outlined by the Ministry of Education, will be permitted to attend child care during the week of January 4 to January 8, 2021. This comes as a result of the province moving all publicly funded and private elementary schools to remote learning from January 4 to January 8, 2021, and mandating that all before and after school programs remain closed during this one-week period. Children's Services worked quickly to develop a plan that would have child care service providers in 11 of Niagara's 12 municipalities providing emergency child care for school aged children of essential workers. An update to the number of spaces available and used will be provided at the next report update.

EarlyON Child and Family Centres offered limited in-person services to families that are involved with Family and Children's Services Niagara throughout November and December, as well as continuing to offer virtual programs and services to children and families. As a result of the province-wide lockdown, all programs have become virtual until the lockdown is lifted.

Licensed child care centres and home child care programs have documented 1,690 child absent days in the month of November that were directly related to COVID-19. These absent days were either for testing, due to children exhibiting COVID-19 like symptoms, or due to isolation by a child or family member. This number has shown a consistent reduction from what was reported in September and October of 2020, mostly due to the change in the COVID-19 operational guidelines around screening and symptoms. This does not include any absent days incurred by children for regular occurrences such as illness, injury, vacation, etc. Children's Services continues to support licensed child care service providers with COVID-19 related costs through one-time support from COVID-19 relief funding. Children's Services expects this to rise as

COVID-19 cases continue to increase and more testing is conducted, and isolation is directed.

Children's Services is continuing to monitor the reopening of child care centres and also continues to provide funding to child care service providers to support their ability to remain open.

At the end of November 2020, there were approximately 5,000 child care spaces across 160 licensed child care centres and 75 home child care providers in Niagara. Although there were roughly 11,035 licensed child care spaces available across Niagara by the end of November 2020, the continued shortage of qualified Registered Early Childhood Educators and the parental decisions to not return their children to child care due to the pandemic, has meant that many child care centres are not operating at their full licensed capacity. At this time, approximately 40 percent of licensed child care spaces are operational from the overall licensed child care system. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a total of 11,595 licensed child care spaces across 169 child care centres, and 90 home based providers in Niagara.

### **Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities (Ontario Works)**

On December 1, 2020, SAEO launched a temporary Housing Stability program for low income residents in Niagara. Housing Stability benefits are designed to assist with last month rent or rental/mortgage arrears. Eligibility for the benefit is determined by the household after tax (net) income and family size. The duration of the program will be based on available funding and will be reviewed regularly.

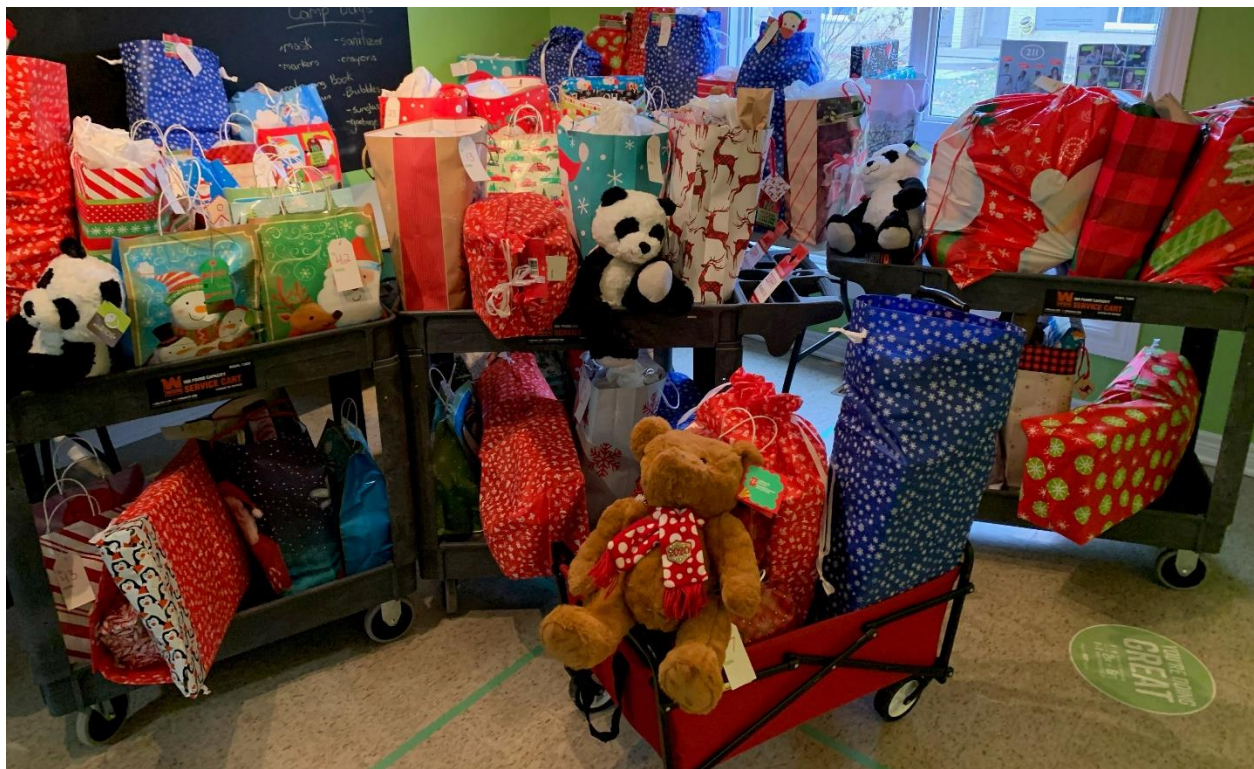
Low income residents in Niagara may apply:

- As of December 1, 2020, directly through the Ontario Works Discretionary Team by phone: 905-641-9960 ext. 6072.
- And as of January 1, 2021, apply online through the Discretionary Benefits Portal at [owbenefits.niagararegion.ca](https://owbenefits.niagararegion.ca).

### **Niagara Regional Housing (NRH)**

The pandemic has exacerbated many additional health and well-being concerns, particularly related to mental health and addictions. NRH is noticing these concerns first-hand, as many tenants are experiencing increased mental health issues, addiction and social crises, that are often heightened by the effects of poverty and poverty-related

issues. NRH is doing everything possible to reduce these negative impacts, as a result of the pandemic, through individualized support to tenants and encouraging creative programming. For example, in December, the RAFT provided “Drive Through After School Programs” in four NRH communities. This programming involved children walking through the Community Houses to chat with RAFT staff while they pick up snack and craft bags. As a further example (and pictured below), NRH, in collaboration with the RAFT and Faith Welland, delivered Christmas bags door-to-door, for tenants in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, and Welland.



Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE  
Commissioner, Community Services