
MEMORANDUM

COM-C 3-2021

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

Date: February 16, 2021

To: Public Health & Social Services Committee

From: Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

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 ongoing outbreaks at Meadows of Dorchester, Woodlands of Sunset, Linhaven as well as Deer Park Suites (assisted living). The outbreaks did not include any resident cases. The outbreaks were cleared on the following dates:

- Woodlands of Sunset was cleared on January 11, 2021
- Meadows of Dorchester was cleared on January 23, 2021
- Linhaven was cleared on January 26, 2021
- Deer Park Suites (assisted living) was cleared on January 9, 2021

At the time of writing this report there are four active outbreaks in Regionally operated LTC homes.

- Northland Pointe – a declared outbreak was triggered on January 2, 2021 when a resident and an asymptomatic employee (through weekly staff surveillance testing)

tested positive for COVID-19. All required outbreak measures were promptly implemented.

- Meadows of Dorchester – an outbreak was declared on January 31, 2021 related to a single employee positive COVID-19 test result (through weekly staff surveillance testing). All required outbreak measures were promptly implemented.
- Gilmore Lodge – an outbreak was declared on February 3, 2021 related to a single employee positive COVID-19 test result. All required outbreak measures have been implemented.
- Rapelje Lodge – a suspect outbreak was declared on December 25, 2020 and the outbreak status was shifted to an active outbreak on January 8, 2021 with the identification of positive cases linked to symptomatic staff and residents. To date, the outbreak has had a significant impact to residents and staff across the home. The home continues to work very closely with Public Health to ensure effective contact tracing and that required infection prevention and control practices are in place to mitigate the impact of the virus in the home.

Vaccine Distribution Planning and Implementation

The first dose of COVID-19 vaccinations, for residents, staff, and essential caregivers of LTC homes in Niagara, began on January 14, 2021. Public Health took the lead on the resident vaccination program and residents were vaccinated on-site with the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine was administered through a collaborative effort of Public Health nurses and LTC home staff. All eligible residents across the eight homes operated by the Region were provided the opportunity to have their first dose of the vaccine. Public Health completed first dose vaccinations of all 32 LTC homes in Niagara in nine days. After completing the LTC resident vaccinations, Public Health moved on to start vaccinations of seniors in assisted living facilities that are co-located with LTC homes and high risk retirement homes, as identified by the Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC). At the Region's Deer Park Suites (assisted living) all eligible residents were vaccinated through an on-site clinic.

Public Health is currently working with LTC homes, assisted living facilities, and high risk retirement homes to initiate clinics to administer the second dose of the vaccine. All LTC homes are anticipated to have received second dose vaccinations for residents by February 13, 2021. Public Health will then complete second dose vaccinations for outstanding assisted living facilities and high risk retirement homes.

Niagara Health took the lead on the vaccination of staff and essential caregivers for long-term care. Niagara Health ran a vaccination clinic at the St. Catharines site and

used the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccination clinic was suspended on January 21, 2021, when the provincial government advised Niagara of a change in vaccine allocation and delivery. All further first dose vaccination appointments were cancelled at that time. During the week of February 1, 2021, Niagara Health was working towards re-scheduling second dose appointments for staff and essential caregivers already vaccinated with the first dose. The re-scheduling will not resume until further communication is provided on vaccine deliveries to Niagara. Across the eight homes operated by the Region, about 50% of staff have received their first dose of the vaccination and many remain in line for when vaccination clinics resume. The uptake from Regional staff has been excellent to date.

Rapid Antigen Testing

The MLTC is mandating that all LTC homes in Ontario implement point-of-care rapid antigen COVID-19 screening tests for staff, students and essential caregivers. LTC homes across Niagara are required to start the transition from weekly polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing to rapid antigen testing by February 16, 2021, with the program required to be fully operational by February 22, 2021.

During the transition phase, LTC homes will be required to complete both weekly PCR testing as well as rapid antigen testing. The MLTC has outlined the following details for the required frequency of rapid antigen testing:

- Staff and students who enter LTC homes **two or more days** during a 7-day period must undergo antigen testing on non-consecutive days, up to three times in the period prior to entry into the LTC home.
- Staff and students who enter LTC homes **only once** in a 7-day period must undergo an antigen test on the “day of” prior to entry into the LTC home.
- Essential caregivers must undergo an antigen test on the “day of” regardless of how many times they attend to a LTC home in a 7-day period.

All staff, students and essential caregivers must continue to be screened, as per the requirements outlined above, prior to being permitted into a LTC home, and homes must ensure completion of weekly data submission to the MLTC on several screening metrics.

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 January, 31, 2021, 415 individuals have been referred to the isolation facility with testing administered in shelter.

Niagara Region was advised on December 15, 2020 that the Region will receive \$4,068,100 in Social Service Relief (SSRF) - Hold Back Funding. The funding guidelines are 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 only until March 31, 2021, and/or can also be used for capital costs to support projects with completion (and occupancy) committed by the end of December 2021. The Region is awaiting a response from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, regarding a request to extend the requirement to have entered into a contribution agreement with a proponent for a capital commitment, in order to use this funding to support an additional capital asset for permanent supportive housing in the region. In the meantime, based on an initial feasibility review, the Region is preparing an expression of interest to allow for potential property owners and realtors to submit potential projects to leverage this funding, according to the funding parameters.

Niagara Health, EMS and Homelessness Services have partnered on a small number of short term LHIN funded pilot projects (until March 31, 2021) aimed to improve mental health and medical support services for individuals experiencing homelessness. The pilot projects incorporate a multifaceted approach focused on increasing urgent access to outpatient supports for patients leaving psychiatric emergency services; enhancing mobile paramedic medical services for individuals experiencing homelessness and connected with the Niagara Assertive Street Outreach team; improving access to supports for individuals accessing the shelter system and experiencing mental health and addiction issues; and, expanding capacity of the Regional Essential Access to Connected Healthcare (REACH) Niagara team to offer short-term recuperation supports for individuals experiencing homelessness and recently discharged from hospital. Through the pilot projects, the REACH Niagara team will also be able to connect individuals within the shelter system to local family practices, community health, and healthcare specialists (e.g. for foot, wound, and dental care), hopefully with longer term benefits.

Homelessness Services is also collaborating with REACH Niagara and Family Health Teams, and coordinating with agencies across the homeless serving system, to inform local planning for the administration of the COVID-19 vaccination for staff and clients within the homeless serving system. Planning is also underway to ensure staff and clients have the necessary information to be able to make an evidence-informed decision about the COVID-19 vaccine, once it is available for this population.

Children's Services

Emergency Child Care

A targeted emergency child care program continued across the province, since January 4, 2021, as a result of the province-wide lockdown (declared on December 26, 2020) and the subsequent stay-at-home order implemented by the province on January 14, 2021. Schools in several public health regions across Ontario, including Niagara region, remained closed with students participating in online learning, which also meant that all before and after school child care programs remained closed as well. As a result, Niagara Region Children's Services continued to provide emergency child care for school aged children of essential workers at Regionally operated child care centres (St. Catharines and Port Colborne). Emergency child care was also provided at a number of licensed child care centres and home child care programs, across Niagara. On February 3, 2021, the province indicated that schools in Niagara will be reopening for in-person learning on February 8, 2021. Emergency child care in Niagara will end on February 5, 2021 and all child care providers will be able to reopen their before and after school programming.

- Across Niagara, 17 licensed child care centres and 29 home child care locations operated emergency child care for school aged children.
- As of February 4, 2021, 301 school aged children in total were placed in emergency child care.
- On average, 232 school aged children attended emergency child care each week. This number increased steadily during each week that emergency child care was available.
- On average, between January 4, 2021, and February 4, 2021 there were approximately 100 school aged children on the waitlist to access emergency child care.

Child care continued for families of infants, toddlers and preschool aged children throughout the initial province-wide lockdown period.

Child Care Updates

Licensed child care centres and home child care programs have documented 1,196 child absent days in December 2020 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 October and November of 2020, mostly due to the change in the COVID-19 operational guidelines related to screening and symptoms. This does not include any absent days incurred by children for regular occurrences such as non-COVID 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.

Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities (Ontario Works)

Throughout the province, the OW caseload has seen a decrease as individuals and families have continued to access the temporary federal COVID-19 benefits, and the Employment Insurance program. As of December 2020, Niagara's OW caseload was 8,615. Overall, Niagara's OW caseload has decreased by 3.3% in 2020 when compared to 2019. The province has seen an overall decrease of 5.1% in the OW caseload.

As federal benefits expire throughout 2021, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) is anticipating a 22% increase in the number of individuals requiring social assistance. In response, MCCSS is centralizing the intake function to create capacity at the local level to respond to the anticipated increase in caseload. The new centralized and automated intake process will be launched in Niagara on February 16, 2021. SAEO has developed a comprehensive transition plan outlining required actions in the areas of engagement, communication, technology, training and development, site readiness and business process review to support a successful launch of the automated intake process.

SAEO continues to offer a blended service delivery model that incorporates in-person, telephone and virtual services to respond to the needs of high-risk clients. Since July 2020, 2,628 clients have received in-person service across the five SAEO sites.

Niagara Regional Housing (NRH)

NRH's development team submitted an application to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) for the Rapid Housing Initiative (RHI). The funding through the RHI would support the full capital request for 32 new modular units on the

POA lands in Welland, purchased by NRH. While waiting for approval, work continues to get the land ready to be able to quickly develop the new modular units and meet the deadline of March 31, 2022 for occupancy, as outlined in the RHI guidelines.

After the province-wide lockdown and the following stay-at-home order, NRH has moved to only responding to urgent/emergency maintenance requests. Community Programs Coordinators (CPCs) continue to offer telephone support and attend NRH housing communities, if necessary, particularly to support the needs of vulnerable tenants. One hundred and thirty-six refurbished computers were delivered to tenants along with information about the CyberSeniors partnership that offers workshops and programs on-line. NRH continues to advocate for affordable internet so that tenants are able to access information, supports and programs.

As a result of a significant mask donation to Niagara Region, NRH began delivering packages of 50 disposable masks to every NRH household. The security student, who is providing support to NRH through a partnership with Niagara College, has been delivering the masks while also doing walks around NRH communities to offer friendly reminders to tenants about COVID-19 guidelines and answering any questions that tenants may have.

Housing providers have been asked to contact NRH should they experience financial stress as a result of COVID-19, such as increased cleaning costs. However, to date, there have not been any requests from housing providers for this type of financial support. NRH will continue to watch for opportunities to support housing providers throughout the pandemic.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Commissioner