
MEMORANDUM

COM-C 20-2021

Subject COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Community Services

Date: May 11, 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

At the time of writing this report, there are two suspect outbreaks within a Regionally operated long-term care (LTC) home:

- Linhaven is in a suspect outbreak due to positive COVID-19 test results for three employees identified through rapid antigen testing. The anticipated clearance date for the suspect outbreak is May 3, 2021.
- Woodlands of Sunset is in a suspect outbreak due to a positive COVID-19 test result for a vaccinated employee. The anticipated clearance date for the suspect outbreak is May 1, 2021.

Since the last report, there have not been any resident cases of COVID-19 at Regional LTC homes. The following homes did have outbreaks in April, but in each outbreak there was no transmission of cases within the homes:

- Rapelje Lodge: April 7, 2021 – April 20, 2021
- Deer Park Villa: April 13, 2021 to April 27, 2021

COVID-19 Vaccine Update

Seniors Services continues to encourage staff and essential caregivers to be vaccinated and are sharing emerging guidance to support decision making for those who may be vaccine hesitant. At this time, the vaccination rates across the homes are as follows:

- Residents: 97%
- Staff: 83%
- Essential caregivers: 85%

Public Health is working in collaboration with Seniors Services to offer continued access to first and second dose vaccinations for residents admitted to LTC homes without full vaccination. Staff and essential caregivers continue to be a priority group for vaccination and can access vaccine clinics through Niagara Health, at the Seymour Hannah Recreation Complex.

Changes to LTC Home Admission / Transfer Requirements

Given the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination program, a number of residents admitted to LTC homes from hospital are now either partially or fully vaccinated. Fully vaccinated means, “an individual has received all doses in their COVID-19 vaccine series and more than 14 days have passed since the receipt of their last dose”. The Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) has issued a number of changes to testing and isolation requirements in recognition of this vaccination status. These changes are as follows:

- Fully immunized residents (two weeks past second dose of immunization)
 - Require a negative lab-based test at time of admission/transfer
 - Do not require isolation (unless the COVID-19 test result is pending)
- Partially immunized or non-immunized residents
 - Require a negative lab-based test at time of admission/transfer
 - Isolation is required for these residents. A lab test will be taken on day 8 of isolation, and if the result is negative, the resident can end isolation on day 10.
- Residents who had COVID-19 in the last 90 days and have recovered
 - Do not need a negative COVID-19 test result
 - Do not need to be isolated

Updated Guidance on Limiting Work to a Single LTC Home

The MLTC has issued an amendment to the restriction that prohibits staff from working in more than one home, or in another health care setting. The amendment now permits staff who are fully vaccinated to work in more than one setting.

Waiving of Co-Payment

The MLTC introduced a program waiving co-payment for patients who accept placement in a home that may not be their preferred choice, to go into effect April 23, 2021. Co-payments for these residents will be waived until they can be transferred to a home of their choice. Residents who accept these placements will maintain priority status on the waitlist for their preferred home. To cover the cost of this incentive program for families, homes will be funded through the regular occupancy funding process.

Transfer of Hospital Patient(s) under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (Amendment to Emergency Order O. 272/21)

The MLTC has introduced a temporary, emergency-based transfer protocol to allow for the transfer of hospital patients to alternate care settings without having to obtain the consent of the patient or their substitute decision-maker.

The intent of this amendment is to enable hospitals to safely and respectfully transfer these patients in order to urgently optimize capacity across the system in the face of rising hospitalization rates, and to allocate ICU and high acuity medicine beds as necessary during the third wave.

Patients transferred out of hospitals under the authority of this order to LTC or retirement homes, who are not placed in their first choice of LTC home, will retain their priority status on the waitlist for their first choice and will be transferred to that home at the earliest available opportunity.

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 April 27, 2021, 604 individuals have been referred to the isolation facility with testing administered in shelter.

COVID-19 Vaccine Update

From April 7 to April 16, five additional COVID-19 vaccination clinics were set up in various emergency shelter locations across the region. The vaccination clinics offered second doses to clients experiencing homelessness, as well as first doses to both clients and staff who may have reconsidered their decision to get vaccinated, or were new to the homeless serving system. The clinics were done in collaboration with Niagara Region Public Health, Niagara Region Homelessness Services, and Regional Essential Access to Connected Healthcare (REACH) Niagara. Through the vaccination clinics, 227 clients have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 89 have received their second dose.

During the COVID-19 vaccination clinics, clients who attended were offered coffee, breakfast and various nourishments. Niagara Region Homelessness services received a generous donation from Starbucks to support the provision of food and refreshments to clients at the clinics.

Prior to implementing the vaccination clinics, Homelessness Services collaborated with REACH Niagara, family health teams, and agencies across the homeless serving system, to inform planning for the administration of the COVID-19 vaccination to this high risk population. REACH Niagara and shelter staff provided clients with information regarding the vaccine, and answered any client questions to address vaccine hesitancy as well as encourage vaccine uptake.

Children's Services

COVID-19 Vaccine Update

Beginning on April 9, 2021 and based on guidance from Niagara's Community Coordination Taskforce for COVID-19 Vaccination, child care, elementary and secondary school sectors were prioritized for COVID-19 vaccination in Niagara. Eligible workers within these sectors were contacted by Regional staff to book their vaccination at Niagara Health's immunization clinic at the Seymour Hannah Recreation Complex in St. Catharines. Approximately 2,000 child care staff were eligible and notified to receive their first dose vaccines.

To note, the province announced that as of April 29, 2021, child care workers in licensed child care settings will be eligible to book a vaccine appointment through the

provincial vaccine booking line or directly through public health units that use their own booking system.

Emergency Child Care Update

The provincial government announced that elementary and secondary students across Ontario would move to remote learning, following the April spring break. As a result, emergency child care services were once again made available to eligible health care and frontline workers, with school-aged children, across Niagara. Children's Services has been actively reaching out to service providers to either increase their capacity at current emergency child care sites if possible, and to consider opening new locations for emergency child care to help offset the demand for service. As of April 23, 2021:

- In total, 22 licensed child care centres and home child care programs were operating emergency child care for school-aged children, across Niagara.
- 530 emergency child care spaces were available across Niagara.
- 452 school-aged children were placed in emergency child care.
- 211 school-aged children were on the waitlist to access emergency child care.

Child Care Services Update

Licensed child care centres and home child care programs documented 5,145 COVID-19 related child absent days in March 2021. This does not include any absent days incurred by children for regular occurrences such as non-COVID-19 illness, injury, absence, etc. Children's Services continues to support licensed child care service providers with COVID-19 related costs through one-time funding supports.

Children's Services has regularly provided information regarding provincial or federal subsidy programs, such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), to help licensed child care service providers mitigate some of the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 federal budget indicated that the CEWS would be extended until September 25, 2021, and that the subsidy rate would be gradually decreased starting on July 4, 2021. This is welcome news to many licensed child care providers as it will continue to help providers manage various operating costs (e.g. staffing costs), and remain economically viable while revenue from parent fees gradually begin to increase as the economy reopens.

Children's Services continues to monitor the child care system and provide support to service providers in their ability to remain open.

Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities (Ontario Works)

The 2021 federal budget made several announcements regarding temporary recovery benefits for Canadians as well as the Employment Insurance (EI) program:

- The Canada Recovery Benefit will be extended by 12 weeks for those who qualify, for a total of 50 weeks, with payments to be phased out by September 2021. The first four additional weeks will be paid at \$500 a week before tax, then reduced to \$300 a week pre-tax for the remaining eight weeks.
- The Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit will be extended four weeks for a total of 42 weeks, at \$500 per week.
- The universal entrance requirements for eligible workers for the EI program will remain at 420 hours for the next three years. Sickness benefits under the EI program will be extended from 15 to 26 weeks.
- Introduction of a new Canada Recovery Hiring Program to help qualifying employers hire employees as the economy reopens by providing up to \$1,129 per week for employees hired between June 6, 2021 and November 20, 2021.

The availability of federal benefits has helped to mitigate the expected increase in demand for social assistance in Niagara. Demand for Ontario Works is predicted to increase in October 2021, leading to rising caseloads and increased administrative pressure for provincial social assistance programs, when temporary federal recovery benefits expire.

SAEO has continued to adapt its focus to new provincial initiatives including Electronic Document Management, Employment Services Transformation and Centralized Intake. SAEO also continues to operate under a blended service delivery model to provide supports to Niagara's most vulnerable residents.

Niagara Regional Housing (NRH)

NRH has continued to provide essential services, in all business streams, while taking all the necessary safety precautions and protocols, during the stay-at-home order that is currently in effect. NRH has also continued to include and support housing providers in all COVID-19 related information and initiatives.

Targeted communication materials are being distributed to promote the vaccines. Identified COVID-19 "hotspots" will receive flyers and posters that indicate their heightened need for vaccine protection. All communications will include translation

documents noting the importance of the information and advising that translation is recommended. Partners will also be engaged to assist through social media and any other forms of communication available to them.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Commissioner