
Subject: Homelessness Services Report 2020

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, May 11, 2021

Recommendations

1. That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

This report provides information regarding Homelessness Services key activities for system transformation, metrics for 2020 and planned activities for 2021.

- Homelessness Services awarded contracts to 18 agencies for a three-year period from April 1, 2020 - March 31, 2023 to deliver homelessness services and participate in system transformation.
- As a Built for Zero community, Niagara achieved a key milestone - the development of a Quality By-Name List - a list of all known individuals experiencing homelessness in the community, updated in real-time.
- Niagara's Assertive Street Outreach team was nationally recognized by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness for its use of mapping software.
- Homelessness Services tested best practices through a 30-bed capacity housing focused shelter pilot (opened June 2020). In the first six months of the pilot, there were 48 admissions with nearly half exiting to permanent housing.
- Niagara's Shelter Diversion program operates in three emergency shelters. The program supports individuals presenting to shelter to access alternate stable housing options with diversion rates of 30% in youth and 9% in adults.
- In 2020, using COVID-19 funding, 20 spaces were added to the Housing First and Home for Good supportive housing programs, bringing the total capacity at the end of the year to 200 and 68, respectively.
- The Housing First and Home for Good Landlord Engagement program expanded to support landlord-tenant relationships, landlord outreach, and housing stability for high acuity clients.
- Homelessness Services responded to COVID-19 through the establishment of a multifaceted system approach.

Financial Considerations

The activities highlighted in this report were provided within the 2020 approved operating budget. As per the 2020 approved budget, Homelessness Services is primarily funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) (\$8,518,012 – 70.7% (which includes Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and Home for Good funding), and also by the federal Reaching Home program (\$945,471 – 7.8%), as well as Regional levy (\$2,590,239 – 21.5%).

Homeless Services received funding specific to incremental costs related to COVID. Available funding from the provincial Social Services Relief Fund for April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021 was \$3,664,729 specific to operating expenditures and \$6,146,057 for capital. Available federal Reaching Home operating funding for April 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 is \$2,958,617.

Analysis

Community Services operationalizes the Region's provincially mandated responsibilities as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the homeless serving system in Niagara. Its key responsibility is service system planning and administration for the homeless-serving system, and it operates under rules established by the MMAH. Niagara Region also receives federal funding under the Reaching Home program and is identified as the local Community Entity for this funding, operating within directives provided by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). Niagara Region is also currently operating within additional, specific COVID-19 funding guidelines and directives for the provincial Social Services Relief Fund and the federal Reaching Home program.

Service system management includes establishing and maintaining relationships with community agencies, setting priorities, identifying gaps and measuring the progress of homelessness goals and objectives. Administrative responsibilities include allocating resources to meet local needs including setting and implementing accountability structures to manage and deliver an outcome-focused service system.

Homelessness Services Metrics

Initiative	2018	2019	2020
Emergency Shelter			
Number of unique individuals accessing shelter	2156	2141	2136
Average length of stay (in days per admission)	25.0	20.9	20.9
Average nightly bed occupancy rate*	104.5%	107.3%	91.6%
Prevention**			
Number of unique households that received a Niagara Emergency Energy Fund (NEEF) issuance	826	802	326
Average value of NEEF issuances	\$681	\$703	\$796
Number of unique households that received a Housing Stability Plan (HSP) benefit	3615	3675	2914
Average value of Housing Stability Plan benefits issued (e.g., rent arrears, last month's rent deposit)	\$738	\$782	\$831
Housing with Related Supports			
Number of unique (new) individuals placed in Housing First	68	63	52
Number of unique (new) individuals placed in Home for Good	33	9	20

*Reasons for decrease in shelter occupancy rate include individuals avoiding shelter related to COVID-19 risk; increase in number of shelter spaces to address changes in shelter policies related to social distancing and COVID-19 protocols; reduced demand for refugee shelter spaces due to policy changes e.g. border closure; and outbreaks not allowing for shelter admissions.

** Reasons for decrease in NEEF and HSP issuances is of the result of temporary measures put in place by the province such as disconnection ban extensions, COVID-19 specific assistance programs and restrictions on evictions.

Homelessness Services Activities

The following are key activities undertaken in 2020 to support continuous improvement within the homeless serving system and drive outcomes related to the reduction of chronic homelessness.

Homelessness Services System Procurement Awards

In the first quarter of 2020, Homelessness Services contracts were awarded based on a negotiated request for proposal process. Approximately \$8.7 M per annum was awarded to 18 agencies in the following priority areas: prevention, outreach, shelter, transitional housing, Niagara Emergency Energy Fund, and Housing First (HF) and Home for Good (HFG) supportive housing programs. As part of Niagara's homeless serving system, agencies deliver services and participate in best practice development opportunities and system transformation efforts.

To achieve an improved integrated homelessness services system, the procurement process resulted in a consolidation of the Housing First and the Home for Good programs, and the formalization of the Niagara Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) team. Gateway Residential and Community Support Services collaborates with The RAFT, Southridge and Port Cares for NASO, and with Southridge for both the HF and HFG programs.

Built for Zero

Through the leadership of Niagara's Built for Zero (BFZ) Home Team, Niagara announced in September 2020 the achievement of a Quality By-Name List - a list of all known individuals experiencing homelessness in the community, updated in real-time.

In order to achieve a Quality By-Name List, Niagara had to score 10/10 on the By-Name List Scorecard, confirm completion of the Provider Participation Tool, and submit three consecutive months of reliable data and set a baseline month. Niagara's baseline month was September 2020; at that time, 306 people were actively experiencing chronic homelessness.

According to Niagara's By-Name List (BNL), 158 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness moved into housing in 2020. Returns from housing for individuals on the BNL were low: 32 during 2020 (fewer than 3 per month, on average). Niagara's dashboard can be found on the [Built for Zero Canada](#) (BFZ-C) website.

Niagara's Homelessness Services team and IT Services won Niagara Region's Corporate Award for Excellence: Innovation and Sustainability. The award was to recognize Niagara as one of a few communities in Canada who have managed to create a BNL solely using real-time client data stored in HIFIS to measure the extent and nature of homelessness in the region.

Niagara Assertive Street Outreach Team

The Niagara Assertive Street Outreach team is a collaboration between Gateway Residential and Community Support Services, The RAFT, Southridge Community Church, and Port Cares. The team expanded, from five members in April 2019 to 13 in April 2020, as part of Niagara's pandemic response to support clients who tend to avoid shelter for safety and social distancing, and generally individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. With the support of the City of St. Catharines, three street outreach workers focused on activities for that specific city. Funding was also obtained through the Niagara Prosperity Initiative for two outreach workers (2019) and a dual diagnosis outreach specialist (2020) which enhanced service delivery and weekend coverage. The NASO team works closely with local area municipalities, St. Lawrence Seaway Corp., the Ministry of Transportation, and hydro companies.

As of May 27, 2020, a centralized community intake line was established to offer a one-stop option for community members and agencies to make a referral to the NASO team by dialing 2-1-1 if they are concerned about someone who is experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

In order to achieve an effective and efficient outreach approach during the pandemic, Niagara developed a customized, online comprehensive mapping and geo-location tool to understand Niagara's hot spots, establishing a new way of tracking street outreach efforts. The [Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness](#) recognized the work as an example of experimenting with new technologies to improve coordinated outreach. The outreach encampment mapping tool has supported the development of new measures that display successes in encampments. The table below includes information on this work.

Encampment information	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020
Number of new encampments	11	5	7
Number of resolved encampments	5	14	6
Number of unique clients supported by Outreach who accessed emergency shelter	26	34	32
Number of unique clients supported by Outreach who accessed housing	10	16	23

Housing Focused Shelter Pilot

In June of 2020, the Housing Focused shelter pilot was established to test best practices of harm reduction, low barrier service and coordinated access approach to housing services. All clients admitted to the housing focused shelter were selected from the By-Name List. Those clients selected for the pilot had experienced an average of 318 days of homelessness in the past year, 639 days of homelessness in the past three years and averaged a score of eight on the VI-SPDAT (indicating an individual with high acuity, complex needs). The 30-bed capacity housing focused shelter pilot has had 48 intakes to date, with almost 50% exiting to permanent housing.

Shelter Diversion Pilot Expansion

Building on the success of The RAFT's Shelter Diversion program, Niagara has expanded the program to two additional emergency shelters (one adult shelter in late 2019 and one youth shelter in mid-2020) in order to support even more individuals presenting to shelter to access stable housing options, where possible, instead of a shelter stay.

In 2020, there were 98 successful diversions for youth (age 16-24 years), representing 30% of possible shelter intakes. In the same period, there were 129 successful diversions for adults (age 25+), representing 9% of possible shelter intakes. The following table contains information on the diversion rates.

Successful Diversion	Youth new to shelter system	All youth presenting at shelter including those that are new	Adults new to shelter system	All adults presenting at shelter including those that are new
No	48.7%	69.9%	74.3%	90.8%
Yes	51.3%	30.0%	25.7%	9.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Housing First and Home For Good

In 2020, in addition to the consolidation of the programs, Housing First and Home for Good have undertaken the following activities in order to align with Built for Zero goals.

- Standardization of policies and procedures between the two programs.
- Pilot the By-Name List to triage individuals into the programs.
- Training and use of the SPDAT suite of tools to support with intensive case management (ICM).
- With the support of provincial COVID-19 Social Services Relief Funding, Niagara added 20 program spaces to Home for Good and enhanced landlord engagement support from one to two staff (FTE) to improve tenant-landlord relations, find appropriate rental opportunities, and improve housing stability for high acuity clients.

Pandemic Response

All of the above successes have been achieved within an environment of COVID-19. Niagara Region and its homelessness partners continued to ensure the ongoing delivery of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following are some examples of how Niagara Region and its partners achieved a coordinated pandemic approach.

1. Establishment of a Self-Isolation Shelter – opened isolation shelter March 30, 2020. As of December 31, 2020, Homelessness Services completed 355 intakes at the isolation shelter with testing administered on site. Of those 355 intakes, 56 individuals moved from isolation into permanent housing, or family reunification took place. Around 1/3 of individuals sought support for mental health and addictions during isolation.
2. As the CMSM, Niagara Region convened the Homelessness Service System on a monthly basis in order to coordinate efforts and provide updates on the COVID-19 response plan.
3. Increased the capacity of the emergency shelter system by securing rooms at motels to provide temporary housing for shelter system clients.
4. One shelter was established dedicated to supporting individuals who are health compromised.
5. Expansion of outreach, Out of the Cold and day programming for unsheltered individuals.
6. Homelessness Services collaborated with Niagara Region Public Health, REACH Niagara (Regional Essential Access to Connected Health) and emergency shelter providers to enhance efforts targeted towards the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19 within the homeless population.
7. Homelessness Services worked closely with Public Health on outbreak management within the shelter system.

Other Planned Enhancements

Enhancements planned or started for 2021:

- Continue COVID-19 responses including implementation of vaccine clinics specifically for individuals experiencing homelessness and those staff who work in congregate settings and the rest of the homeless serving system.
- Capital builds for permanent supportive housing units, bridge housing units, and recuperative care beds.
- Increase physical accessibility within the shelter system through a \$60,000 grant obtained from the Inclusive Community Grants Program, Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.
- Built for Zero - continue to work on implementing a coordinated access system, implement a common assessment and mini diversion tool across the homeless serving system.
- In alignment with the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, continue to implement system transformation in the areas of housing focused shelter, prevention and transitional housing.
- Enhance HIFIS through improved data quality and policy projects.
- COVID-19 funding has allowed for additional mental health worker supports for Home for Good supportive housing clients, emergency shelter and high acuity clients of the housing focused shelter.
- Implement a Point-in-Time Count of homelessness, with results reporting in Q3 of 2021.
- Develop the Homelessness Services data strategy to enhance measurement and progress toward program and system-wide key performance indicators

Alternatives Reviewed

N/A.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Homelessness services support the Healthy and Vibrant Community Council Priority.

Other Pertinent Reports

- CWCD 286-2020 Homelessness Plans for Winter 2020
- CWCD 171-2020 Niagara Assertive Street Outreach (NASO) 211 Referral Line

- CWCD 108-2020 Confirmation of Incremental CHPI Funding – Homelessness (COVID-19)
- CWCD 103-2020 Confirmation of Incremental Reaching Home Funding – Homelessness (COVID-19)
- COM C 14-2020 2020 RFPQ-08–Niagara Emergency Energy Fund NEEF
- COM C 13-2020 2019 RFP-305–Prevention Request for Proposal Award Results
- COM C 11-2020 2019 RFP-308–Housing with Supports – Supported Transitional Housing Request for Proposal Award Results
- COM C 9-2020 2019-RFP-311 Housing for Good for Proposal Award Results
- COM C 8-2020 2019-RFP-310 Housing First Request for Proposal Award Results
- COM C 7-2020 2019-RFP-300 – Assertive Street Outreach Request for Proposal Award Results
- COM 14-2020 Homelessness System Report
- COM 8-2020 Housing and Homelessness Action Plan Update 2019
- COM 6-2020 Homelessness Services Housing First and Home for Good Contract Extensions
- COM 4-2020 Emergency Shelter Negotiated Request for Proposal (NRFP) Award Results
- COM 1-2020 Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative Investment Plan 2020-21
- CWCD 285-2019: Niagara Region Participation in Built for Zero Canada

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