Subject: Seniors Services Quality Improvement Report – January - March 2021

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 15, 2021

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with highlights of quality initiatives and outcomes for the first quarter of 2021 for Seniors Services.
- Areas of focus in this report are:
    - Highlights of new programs issued by the province to support recruitment in the long-term care sector
    - The role of Niagara Region's Seniors Community Programs in the pandemic.

Financial Considerations

The Ministry of Long-Term Care (MLTC) and Ontario Health West are the primary sources of funding for the Seniors Services division.

The province has introduced a number of long-term care recruitment initiatives to address staffing challenges in the sector. The province is providing funding to offset program related costs such as incentive bonuses and payment for internships.

Senior Community Programs provides a range of services for seniors who want to keep active and stay in their home as long as possible. Most of these services involve in-person group programs, not permitted for the majority of the year due to COVID-19 restrictions. Community Programs staff were redeployed:

- to address emerging community priorities (wellness calls, vaccine roll-out support, food security support, medication security support, social isolation support)
- to support the long-term care homes with resident social support.

Many services did resume virtually toward the end of the year; however, the interruption to service for the majority of the year resulted in a year-end surplus. The 2020 annual funding for Seniors Community Programs is $6.68M (100% Ontario Health/LHIN dollars)

and the returnable (surplus) related to service disruption is $433,387 (approximately 6.6%). The most significant variances relate to suspension of the Respite Companion Program and Respite Companion Program mileage costs as well as the suspension of Adult Day Program meal costs.

Analysis

Long-Term Care Recruitment

The long-term care sector has faced significant recruitment challenges due to the current nursing and personal support worker (PSW) shortage across Ontario. The provincial staffing plan to increase staffing levels to four hours per resident per day, although welcomed, further exacerbates previously long standing recruitment challenges. To address these challenges and support the development of a local pool of employees, Seniors Services has applied to three provincial recruitment support programs: the Community Commitment Program for Nurses, the Personal Support Worker Return of Service Program and the Personal Support Worker Accelerated Program.

Community Commitment Program for Nurses (CCPN)

This temporary initiative offers eligible nurses (RPNs, RNs and NPs) a $10,000 incentive in exchange for a 12-month commitment to a long-term care home in Ontario. The province developed the program to incent nurses to return to the workforce and as such to be eligible for the program, applicants cannot have been employed as a nurse in Ontario in the 6 months prior to being hired.

Seniors Services has applied for this program and has been accepted as an eligible employer. To date we have not successfully recruited nurses through this initiative but will continue to pursue opportunities through the summer.

Personal Support Worker Return of Service (PSW ROS) Initiative

This program is designed to attract newly graduated Personal Support Workers to work in long-term care homes. This initiative provides a $5,000 incentive to recent PSW graduates in exchange for a six-month commitment to an eligible long-term care employer.

Seniors Services has applied for this program and has been accepted as an eligible employer. To date we have successfully recruited four PSW's through this initiative. We continue to pursue further recruitment through this program.

Personal Support Worker Accelerated Program

This program was also introduced to help address the PSW shortage in Ontario. Through the PSW Accelerated Program the province provides funding to PSW college programs. The colleges in turn flow these funds to long-term care homes who hire PSW students to complete their placement hours. This unique initiative affords Niagara Region the opportunity to compensate PSW students for their placements (through provincial funding) and to offer permanent work to students when they complete their internship and successfully graduate from the program with a PSW certificate.

During the spring of 2020 Seniors Services hosted 13 PSW intern students. The students are currently completing their program and we are anticipating an 85% hire rate from this group of students.

We are working in collaboration with Niagara College to onboard 20 PSW interns into the homes in August 2021 and a further 20 interns in September 2021.

Further to these three provincial programs, Seniors Services has undertaken a number of initiatives in collaboration with Human Resources to support workforce planning, recruitment, and retention. Seniors Services will provide updates on these initiatives throughout 2021.

Seniors Community Programs

This year has presented unprecedented challenges. As Ministry of Health, and Public Health guidance were issued, much of Seniors Community Programs were temporarily suspended due directives that prohibited in-person and/or group models of service delivery. A number of programs have been gradually re-introduced within COVID-19 restrictions and some programs have transitioned to a hybrid model of virtual and in-person support and services. A number of staff have been redeployed to support long-term care and some staff have been redeployed to help address urgent community related pressures arising.

Highlights of some key services changes are as follows:

Adult Day Program

- When lock-down measures and indoor gathering restrictions required Adult Day Programs (ADP) to be suspended, ADP staff were redeployed to a number of priority roles. One area of redeployment was to long-term care homes where ADP staff have supported the in-home recreation staff in providing over 38,000 resident interactions (facilitating client/family virtual visits, one to one meaningful activity and small group activity).

- To understand the readiness and willingness to return to in-person service and to explore virtual service options, Seniors Community Programs conducted community engagement discussions with key stakeholders (existing clients, LHIN, community support services peers). Virtual services were developed and implemented to support continued social connection while clients were isolated at home based on the feedback from this engagement.

- A hybrid ADP model was developed and implemented as a pilot, offering half-day in-person services supplemented with virtual programming. Given indoor gathering restrictions, the program has been suspended in the current lock-down.

Respite Companion Services

This program provides one to one service for clients living with dementia through a brokerage model. Respite contractors are matched with a client referral, with family paying the contractor directly. Service focusses on meaningful one to one activity directly with the client in their home. The program was effected by the restrictions of the pandemic. The program suspended service March 2020 to Sept 2020, re-opened under modified conditions September 2020 to December 2020, then closed again as per the restrictions of the current lock-down. While the program was suspended, Respite Companions provided valuable support in addressing emerging needs.

- Respite Companions supported telephone based wellness calls to isolated seniors in the community and have provided ongoing regular wellness check-ins for clients to help address social isolation through the newly established Calls4Connection Program. The calls include a wellness screen which help to identify seniors at risk and coordinates community worker follow-up as needed.

- Respite Companions have also been active in providing vaccination booking support for vulnerable populations.

- The Respite Manager worked in collaboration with Public Health to:
    - provide training on ageism for vaccine clinic volunteers
    - to assess the community vaccine clinics through an “age friendly” lens to optimize the experience, safety, and outcomes of seniors at the clinics.

Healthy, Safe, and Strong Exercise Program

This community based exercise program reliant on in-kind community space (i.e. community center, churches) could not operate within the COVID-19 restrictions. To ensure seniors continued to benefit from exercise programs developed to support falls prevention, the program transitioned to a virtual model.

- Community Programs identified virtual programming platforms, developed content, addressed legal and privacy considerations and introduced a virtual pilot program in August 2020.

- Fall registration focused exclusively on virtual classes and the program welcomed 175 participants.

- Participant evaluations have informed program enhancements and the participation levels continue to grow. The program has now expanded to assisted living environments and other senior congregate settings in the community.

- Pre-pandemic, classes were closed when in-kind space was not available and/or under poor weather conditions (winter storm, excessive heat) for overall health and safety of clients and staff. In the future, Seniors Community Programs can leverage the virtual platform that has been developed, when in-person services options are impacted.

Outreach Services

Outreach Services provides one-to-one support for seniors in crisis in the community. To mitigate risk throughout the pandemic the program made a number of adjustments.

Amended practices introduced client and household screening prior to attending a home visit.

- Staff had their first contact with the senior by telephone whenever possible.

- In-home visits continue for the highest risk clients in need of supports related to food security, shelter, medical appointment/medication, and transportation.
- Clients and their respective households, as well as outreach services staff, complete screening prior to an in-home visit, and follow infection prevention and control measures including wearing appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Outreach Services has had a significant influx of referrals as a result of the pandemic.

With the transition to a pandemic recovery plan, Seniors Community Programs will continue to ensure incremental program changes and adjustments to meet the changing needs of seniors in the community.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

- Healthy and Vibrant Community – supporting the delivery of quality care to Niagara's senior population

Other Pertinent Reports

- COM 3-2021 Seniors Services Quality Improvement Report, Oct. to Dec. 2020
- COM 14-2021 Approval of 2020/2021 Community Services Program Audits

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Seniors Services Report Card 2021