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**Subject:** Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, 2021-2025

**Report to:** Regional Council

**Report date:** Thursday, June 24, 2021

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## Recommendations

1. That Regional Council **ADOPT** Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, 2021-2025, attached as Appendix A to Report CAO 12-2021;
2. That the request for additional resources to implement and sustain Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan (2021-2025), as outlined in Report CAO 12-2021, **BE CONSIDERED** as part of the 2022 Budget Process; and
3. That staff **BE DIRECTED** to submit Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan to the Ministry of the Solicitor General in accordance with the *Police Services Act, 1990*.

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to propose Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Plan for Regional Council approval and adoption, in accordance with the legislative requirements under the *Police Services Act, 1990*.
- CSWB planning involves a recognition that safety and well-being cannot be addressed in isolation by any one organization or sector.
- Frequently, police or other crisis-driven services are required to respond to situations which could be address earlier and more effectively through greater collaboration among sectors (including police, education, health and social services).
- Niagara's CSWB Plan was developed in collaboration with community partners following extensive community consultation and data assessment, to create a sustainable and long-term plan to improve safety and well-being for Niagara residents.
- Niagara's CSWB Plan identifies opportunities for collective action, alignment and monitoring related to four areas of focus: mental health and

addictions, housing and homelessness, poverty and income and systemic discrimination.

- Regional support and resources for implementation are key considerations as CSWB partners begin implementation activities.
- The CSWB Plan, in addition to the ongoing work to address the plan's objectives, will be reviewed annually by the Advisory Committee. Similarly, staff will develop an annual progress report highlighting updates, milestones, next steps and new activities to be shared with Council.

## **Financial Considerations**

In December 2019, Regional Council approved a temporary full-time position to provide project management support and conduct necessary, fulsome community consultation required to develop Niagara's CSWB Plan. The initiative was funded in the 2020 budget with one-time reserve funding. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the extension to the CSWB plan deadline, the one-time funding was encumbered to 2021 to see the plan development through to completion.

The Region has a provincially legislated responsibility to coordinate the development, implementation and monitoring of the CSWB Plan, and as such, continued resources will be required to support the long-term sustainability of the plan and facilitate implementation of priorities under each of our areas of focus.

To implement and sustain the operations of the CSWB Plan, ongoing funding for one full-time position and other associated expenses will be required. It is important to note that while this new service obligation was imposed by the Province without funding, a critical driver behind sustaining the CSWB Plan is its direct association with community growth. As Niagara's population grows and changes, it is important to ensure strong levels of safety and continue to enhance the well-being of residents who are vulnerable due to social, economic and health-related risk factors. Implementation of Niagara's CSWB Plan, which involves activities designed to be upstream or preventative as opposed to reactionary, will ensure efficiency and sustainability of future service delivery.

The total estimated cost of the additional resources is \$125,000. The request for these resources will be considered as part of the 2022 Levy Operating Budget process to be funded through new assessment growth.

## Analysis

### Background

Beginning in 2009, the Ministry of the Solicitor General (formerly Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services) identified that police services were frequently responding to crisis situations that were non-criminal in nature. These findings were consistent across Ontario, and identified a need for a more collaborative service delivery model to prioritize local needs to improve safety and well-being. A series of provincial reports were released, culminating with the Community Safety and Well-Being Planning Framework

(<https://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/Publications/MCSCSSSOPanningFramework.html>) in 2017.

The framework has four zones of intervention and encourages upstream or prevention-based planning to reduce harm, crime or victimization of individuals by meeting their needs before escalation to crisis, and prevent more costly emergency response interventions. Developing strategies that are preventative as opposed to reactive are viewed to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of service delivery.

### Timeline and Milestones

The CSWB Plan has been under development since January 2020, with the following milestones achieved:

- **January to March 2020:**
  - CSWB Advisory Committee was formed and is comprised of representation from the local police service board, Niagara Regional Police Service, and providers in health services, mental health services, education, community services, and children/youth services. The Advisory Committee was tasked with directing Niagara's strengths-based approach for planning, collaboration, engagement and action – building on how the human service system works together to enhance the health, safety and well-being of Niagara residents.
  - A *Data Analytics Group* was formed to identify evidence of emerging issues, support the data requirements of the Advisory Committee, facilitate information-sharing and data collaboration, and support performance measurement.

- Phase 1: Community consultation was conducted, which included a public survey, focus groups and neighbourhood forums. As a consequence of the pandemic, community consultation was disrupted.
- As a result, an Interim Report on CSWB Community Consultation (<https://www.niagararegion.ca/projects/community-safety-well-being/pdf/interim-report.pdf>) was released which provided summary findings on early themes, while recognizing that critical input from various, diverse communities was still needed to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive approach to consultation.
- **April 2020**
  - Following the emergency orders and lockdown measures, the Ontario provincial government passed the Coronavirus Support and Protection Act, 2020 on April 14, which included an amendment to the previous deadline (i.e. January 1, 2021) under the Police Services Act for municipalities to develop and adopt community safety and well-being plans.
- **June to December 2020**
  - In consideration of the rescinded legislative deadline, restrictions to in-person consultations, and demands placed on the local human services system, the CSWB Advisory Committee convened to focus on the collective coordination of resuming or reopening services in Niagara through a Community Recovery Planning Table. It was recognized that Niagara's CSWB Plan will be further enhanced through the work of short-term recovery planning, leveraging data and information-sharing made possible through this Table, and would contribute to a more in-depth understanding of how emergency events, such as the pandemic, affect vulnerable groups who were already at risk of harm or victimization.
  - In December, a new deadline (July 1, 2021) was announced, providing municipalities with an additional six months to complete their CSWB plans.
- **January to May 2021**
  - Phase 2: Community Consultation was conducted which included an additional public survey and targeted engagement completed virtually. Niagara Chapter of Native Women (lead agency) and N.I.C.E. (Niagara Indigenous Community Executives) worked alongside Regional staff to provide opportunities for off-reserve Indigenous peoples to share their perspectives on safety and well-being while living in the Niagara region. The recommendations and report findings were based on feedback collected over five sessions offered between February 16 and March 4,

2021. The final report entitled, “*Mno Bmaadziwin: Indigenous Engagement Report for Community Safety and Well-Being*” can be found in Appendix B.

- Leveraging robust feedback from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of consultation, and data trends/insights identified at the community recovery planning table, the Advisory Committee completed a process of issue identification and prioritization.

## Key Inputs in the Planning Process

### 1. Ministry Framework

The Ministry of the Solicitor General's Community Safety and Well-being Planning Framework has been applied to develop a comprehensive approach to mitigate harm and promote safety and well-being along the following four domains of intervention:

- **Social Development:** Addresses underlying causes of social issues through upstream approaches that promote and maintain individual and community wellness;
- **Prevention:** Applies proactive strategies to known and identified risks that are likely to result in harm to individuals or communities if left unmitigated;
- **Risk Intervention:** Identifies and responds to situations of acutely elevated risk and mobilizes immediate interventions before an emergency or crisis-driven response is required; and,
- **Incident Response:** Requires intervention by first responders such as police, paramedics, and other crisis-driven services in the human services sectors.

### 2. Research and Analysis

Extensive research and analysis has been undertaken to inform the Plan and its areas of focus including analysis of local police, public health, social services, child welfare, family violence, labour market and census data, environmental scans of existing strategies and initiatives in Niagara that align with the Ministry framework, jurisdictional scans, as well as discussions with community partners.

### 3. Community Engagement

In total, 310 residents participated in 37 focus group sessions, held both in-person prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and virtually during the pandemic. Consultations sought to

collaborate with participants in determining local safe and well-being priorities, and identifying local strengths and opportunities. Engagement sessions were held with communities which represent diverse perspectives and experiences, from youth to seniors, community organizations to business operators, and from those who live across the region. Two public surveys (Community Safety and Well-Being Survey and Public Health's Community Health Survey) administered prior to and during the pandemic, provided critical insight into resident perceptions of individual and community health, safety and well-being. As part of the flexible and adaptive approach to CSWB planning, ongoing opportunities for community engagement will continue to be made available to meet emerging needs,

#### 4. Partnerships

The CSWB Advisory Committee is comprised of 22 local organizations who have come together to develop a sustainable and long-term plan for Niagara residents and to establish a shared commitment to action. Additionally, many residents including service providers, youth and families have participated in community consultations sharing their perspectives and shaping local priorities and activities for the coming years. Building meaningful partnerships and facilitating collaboration across sectors is pivotal to the successful implementation of the CSWB Plan.

#### Areas of Focus

The Advisory Committee has identified a number of local issues for action, alignment or monitoring within four areas of focus: **mental health and addictions, housing and homelessness, poverty and income**, and **systemic discrimination** in Niagara. These areas of focus involve targeted strategies, to improve the integration and coordination of existing services, mitigate risk factors and serve to improve resident safety and well-being using a holistic approach to planning.

Niagara's CSWB Plan aims to guide planning and prioritization, evolve and adapt over time to continue to respond to emerging issues, and identify and champion innovative solutions to complex challenges.

#### Next Steps

The planning framework brings together community partners in recognizing that everyone has a role to play in making Niagara a safe, inclusive and connected community where all residents thrive. Following adoption of the Plan, new structures will

be developed to support implementation. This will include establishing leads, Action Tables, plans for ongoing community engagement at different levels of involvement, and enhanced data collection and coordination to keep a pulse on the evolving needs of communities so that community partners can stay ahead of the curve and respond to issues in a more proactive manner.

Regional Council will receive annual updates as the Plan progresses and evolves.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not applicable. The development and adoption of municipal community safety and well-being plans is required under the *Police Services Act, 1990*.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan aligns with Council Strategic Priority Two: Healthy and Vibrant Community. The goal of this priority is to foster a high quality of life through safe, healthy and inclusive neighbourhoods.

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

- CAO 17-2020: Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan Update

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, 2021-2025

Appendix B: Mno Bmaadziwin: Indigenous Engagement Report for Community Safety and Well-Being