
Subject: Niagara Prosperity Initiative 2021 Update

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, July 13, 2021

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- The purpose of the report is to update committee on the 16 projects approved under the Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) for June 2021 to August 2022.
- NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions to help build capacity and improve the quality of life for residents living in poverty.
- Priorities for 2021 have been informed by impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and as such, funding was targeted to identify needs in the areas of housing, health and domestic violence.
- NPI is a 100% levy funded program with a 2021 annual budget of \$1.25 million.
- In 2021, Brock University completed a three-year research project to review the impact of the NPI program.
- A comprehensive review of the analysis and recommendations outlined in “Connecting the Pieces: An Evaluation of the Niagara Prosperity Initiative and Call for a Broader Poverty Reduction Strategy for Niagara” is underway.
- Staff will present the report and staff recommendations including an approach for the future of NPI and a Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy to Public Health and Social Services Committee (PHSSC) in September 2021.

Financial Considerations

While considering Community Services’ operating budget, Council reviews the investment of NPI funding annually. Since 2008, Regional Council has typically invested \$1.5 million annually toward increasing prosperity for Niagara residents living in poverty. In both 2020 and 2021, the investment was reduced to \$1.25 million in order to mitigate budget pressures in other areas. Each year, \$150,000 of the budgeted amount is allocated to the Convener (Niagara Community Foundation) and Secretariat (United Way Niagara) functions to support administration and stakeholder engagement associated with this initiative. Additionally, United Way Niagara reported \$44,938 in

unspent funding (including interest) from previous projects, resulting in a total project allocation of \$1,144,938, excluding administration. The total program cost for 2021 is within the 2021 approved budget. This funding does not include other additional non-mandatory levy contributions that council directs to other poverty reduction/alleviation efforts such as investments in homelessness services housing and discretionary benefits for social assistance recipients.

Analysis

NPI focuses on neighbourhood-based interventions and development to increase prosperity for Niagara residents living in poverty.

For 2021, NPI committed to providing supports to help communities rebuild and recover from the devastating impacts of COVID-19. The pandemic has exacerbated and amplified many of the issues caused by poverty. United Way Niagara and Niagara Regional staff reviewed local data, reports and spoke with experts in the community to help determine which areas of need required additional funding as a result of the pandemic. As an outcome of this review, the 2021 NPI Request for Proposals (RFP) targeted needs in the areas of housing, health and domestic violence.

1. **Housing** (improving housing stability through neighbourhood connectedness, enhancing the existing street outreach system, improving the health and well-being of individuals experiencing homelessness and expanding services that enable people to find and retain a home).
2. **Health** (expand access to free, quality mental health and addictions services, increase access to virtual or in-person addictions treatment, reduce isolation, increase access to dental health care, address the impacts of trauma, promote healthy child development and expand coordination across food bank programs).
3. **Domestic Violence** (expand crisis-based services that provide counselling and safety planning for women experiencing intimate partner violence, increase access to early intervention and family violence programs, increase access to virtual or in-person group and one-on-one counselling for those healing from the effects of violence and abuse).

The 2021 RFP was issued March 1st and closed April 2nd. Thirty-seven applications from thirty different agencies, with a total funding request of \$4,206,285 were received.

Niagara Region approves funding applications based on the recommendations of an independent review committee. Review committee members for 2021 included three Regional Councillors (B. Greenwood, L. Ip, L. Villella); two Niagara Region employees (Children's Services and Public Health); and seven members of the public including individuals with lived experience in poverty. Assessors reviewed each of their assigned proposals independently followed by group discussion on funding recommendations in three half-day meetings held in May 2021.

The criteria for assessment matched the proposal criteria and a list of review considerations were used to decide if the proposal was recommended or not recommended. After discussing all proposals, the group completed their final approvals and corresponding proposed budget recommendations. United Way Niagara finalized contracts based on these recommendations and a list of the approved projects by municipality is attached as Appendix 1.

Within the three streams of funding, eight projects are under Health, six projects are under Housing and two projects are under Domestic Violence.

Types of Projects	\$	%	# of Projects
Health – Mental Health/Addictions, Dental, Food	\$592,576	52%	8
Housing – Access, Outreach, Stability	\$400,154	35%	6
Domestic Violence – Early Intervention	\$152,208	13%	2
Total	\$1,144,938	100%	16

All sixteen projects will be funded to a maximum of 15 months with contracts ending August 30, 2022. Agencies have been advised that if they are unable to execute the project fully as a result of COVID-19, Niagara Region will recover unspent funds as soon as possible to ensure they can be redirected to urgent needs.

NPI Review

In 2018, Niagara Region's Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities (SAEO) division obtained funding of \$476,763 from the province's Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF) for a three-year research project.

SAEO contracted with Brock University to complete the research. Brock University completed their review of NPI and the executive summary of the “Connecting the Pieces: An Evaluation of the Niagara Prosperity Initiative and Call for a Broader Poverty Reduction Strategy for Niagara” report was presented to PHSSC in March 2021. Within the executive summary, Brock proposed five recommendations to enhance Niagara Region’s response to poverty; develop a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy, increase investment, offer longer term and more deliberate funding, enhance research and design services for social inclusion aligned with poverty reduction priorities.

To support Niagara Region’s future responses to poverty, SAEO staff are working with Clarico Group Inc. to use the results of the Brock study to:

- Gain an understanding of the Region’s broader investments in poverty reduction;
- Propose an approach for the implementation of a broader Poverty Reduction strategy that would consider the investments into poverty reduction; and
- Propose to Council a new approach for NPI investments in the context of a broader Poverty Reduction strategy

The report will be presented at the September 2021 PHSSC meeting with the intent to implement Council-approved recommendations for NPI in 2022.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Investing funding and collaborative action in neighbourhoods in need supports Council’s strategic priority of Fostering an Environment for Economic Prosperity. Outcomes are realized by helping residents thrive through greater opportunities and relate to employment and improved community symptoms.

Other Pertinent Reports

COM 4 – 2021 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Review

COM 2 – 2021 Evaluation of 2108 Niagara Prosperity Initiatives Projects

COM 44-2011 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Update (Building a New Legacy: Building Prosperity by Improving the Quality of Neighbourhood Life)

COM 04-2008 A Legacy of Poverty Addressing Cycles of Poverty and the Impact on
Child Health in Niagara Region

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This report was prepared in consultation with Marc Todd, Manager, Community Services.

Appendices

Appendix 1 List of approved 2021 NPI projects by agency & municipality