
Subject: Niagara Prosperity Initiative Path Forward Update

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 14, 2022

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to update Council on progress made in 2022 related to the Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI).
- [COM 22-2021 A Path Forward to Building a Five Year Poverty Reduction Strategy](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19005) (<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19005>) outlined recommendations that support a new approach for NPI investments in the context of a broader Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS).
- In preparation for an upcoming request for proposals, staff engaged internal and external stakeholders to understand the greatest impact on addressing poverty, specific to the impacts of the pandemic.
- The community identified six areas of focus: Adverse Childhood Experience, Food Access, Housing, Domestic Violence, Indigenous Wellbeing, and Living Wage.
- A Request for Proposal (RFP) will be issued in June 2022 for two-year funding that will focus on these six areas.

Financial Considerations

An investment of \$1,500,000, is included in the 2022 Community Services operating budget for NPI. 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, ProKids, and discretionary benefits for social assistance recipients.

Each year, \$150,000 of the NPI budget is allocated to support administration and stakeholder engagement associated with this initiative. The new approach for NPI investments included transitioning NPI in-house to Community Services to lead the development of the NPRS, ensuring more coordinated poverty related investments and

reducing administrative costs. The transition included hiring a temporary, dedicated internal full-time resource to lead the development of the NPRS.

Prior to the new approach, these functions were contracted with United Way Niagara and the Niagara Community Foundation. To support a successful transition of NPI administration to Community Services, staff worked with United Way Niagara to extend their current contract that was set to expire December 31, 2021, until October 31, 2022. Unspent funds that were returned from prior year completed projects were used to support the contract extension. This will support the uninterrupted continuation and administrative support of the existing sixteen previously funded NPI projects that are set to end in August 2022.

All costs to support the overall poverty reduction strategy including related administration costs will continue to be within the approved budget envelope.

Analysis

Background

In October 2021, staff received Council approval to begin the development of a Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS) and a new approach for NPI investments ([COM 22-2021 A Path Forward to Building a Five Year Poverty Reduction Strategy](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19005) {https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19005}). The development of the strategy and new approach includes consistent engagement with stakeholders who have common agendas in eliminating poverty in Niagara.

Stakeholder Engagement

As part of the early stages of strategy development and to inform the upcoming call for proposals, staff met with each of the twelve local municipality CAO's, Niagara Regional Native Centre, Niagara's Lived Experience Advisory Committee, Niagara Poverty Reduction Network, Women's Advisory Committee, United Way Niagara, Niagara Community Foundation, and a wide range of poverty serving agencies. In these meetings, stakeholders were able to describe what challenges they, their community or organization faced related to poverty. Lack of affordable housing and food security were consistent themes.

Staff also met with divisions internal to Niagara Region to understand alignment with existing initiatives related to poverty reduction. Information was collected related to the Housing and Homelessness Action Plan, Mno Bmaadziwin: Living the Good and

Healthy Life, Creating Our Way Forward: Recommendations for Improving Niagara Region Public Health and Emergency Services' Indigenous Engagement, Community Safety and Well Being Plan, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and the Health Equity Strategy.

The information was analyzed in terms of where existing initiatives intersect with poverty reduction, and this supported decisions as to funding priorities for the upcoming request for proposals, and will also be embedded into the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

A consistent message from internal and external stakeholders, and people with lived experience was that the pandemic exacerbated and amplified issues for people living in poverty. There are more complex mental health and addictions issues, an increase in domestic violence, a stifling of early child development, and an even greater negative impact on certain populations (e.g. racialized minorities, Indigenous peoples, women and seniors).

2022 Request for Proposal

Stakeholder engagement informed the process of identifying the areas of greatest need, activities that can have the greatest impact and gaps in service. Further to previous recommendations, deliberate investments and fewer funding priorities, with the goal of deeper impact, have been established. The following areas of focus will be included in the 2022 NPI RFP:

1. Indigenous Wellbeing: Home Care Workers for the Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program
2. Adverse Childhood Experience: Early Childhood Development Program
3. Food Access: Pop-Up and Mobile Food Markets
4. Housing: Community Integration Workers
5. Domestic Violence: After-Care for Domestic Violence Survivors
6. Living Wage: Marketing and Promotion

An information session for local community service agencies will be held in June 2022, after the release of the RFP, which will be open for five weeks. The process to review applications will adhere to Regional Procurement Policies. As part of the application, agencies will need to articulate their strategy of ensuring inclusive environment(s), where services are designed and delivered in a way that is responsive to diverse populations and in alignment with local needs (i.e. Indigenous families, Francophone families, diverse cultures, immigrants and refugees, individuals with various disabilities, etc.). Funding for projects is expected to begin in the fall of 2022. A report will be

presented at the September 2022 PHSSC meeting on the projects approved for October 2022 to October 2024.

Next Steps

Moving forward, staff will continue to review best practices and evidence-based approaches to reducing poverty. Planning will ensure an inclusive view of all Regional investments that seek to reduce poverty to ensure alignment, effectiveness and strategic investments into services that meet critical needs and are outcome driven. An Accountability Table, including a Steering Committee, will be created in order to guide this work, and future NPI investments will be considered in the context of a broader Niagara Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2024. Research and statistics collected to date will be made available on the Niagara Region website.

Alternatives Reviewed

This report is initiated by staff to provide Council with an update on progress to date related to a new approach for NPI investments in the context of a broader Poverty Reduction Strategy.

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, relate to employment and improved community symptoms.

Other Pertinent Reports

- [COM 4-2021 Niagara Prosperity Initiative Review](https://pub-niagararegion.escibemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=14911) (https://pub-niagararegion.escibemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=14911)
- [COM 22-2021 A Path Forward to Building a Five Year Poverty Reduction Strategy](https://pub-niagararegion.escibemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19005) (https://pub-niagararegion.escibemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19005)

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