

Niagara EMS Taxi Services Pilot Project Update

**Public Health & Social Services Committee
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Niagara EMS Taxi Services Pilot Project Update

Agenda:

- Purpose
- Pilot Project Overview
- Patient Eligibility Requirements & Process Review
- Early Outcomes
- Financial Impacts
- Next Steps

Purpose: Why Was This Project Needed?

- Transportation is a social determinant of health (SDOH) that affects both rural and urban communities contributing to health inequity.
- Each year many Niagara residents do not obtain the medical care they need due to transportation barriers.
- Our Niagara EMS experience is that many calls to 911 for an ambulance are primarily for conveyance to a hospital.
- Providing this transport option will better meet patient needs, and help preserve both ambulance availability and hospital emergency department capacity, particularly during this time when both are severely stressed

Pilot Project Overview

- A contract between Niagara EMS and Taxitab (Central Taxi) has been initiated to determine the effectiveness of this new program, and evaluate the costs associated with the taxi service.
- This agreement can be terminated at any time during the pilot if deemed necessary.
- It is projected to cost less than \$10,000/per year based on usage projections and the strict medical eligibility criteria that have been put in place.

Patient Eligibility Requirements

- Consultation with Niagara EMS medical directors occurred to ensure strict medical eligibility criteria was approved and put in place for all patients that would be permitted transport in a taxi.
- Niagara EMS staff are required to complete a formal training module before having access to the program, which stipulates they may only use the taxi service for patients if all of the criteria are met.
- Reviewing Emergency Communications Nurse usage of the service thus far, the most common low-acuity concerns that have resulted in taxi transport include back pain, general anxiety, and upper respiratory infection symptoms.

Process Review:

How Do Individuals Access This Service?

- Individuals cannot call 911 to request a taxi.
- All options for transport are discussed with the patient (such as family, friends or public transit) before use of the taxi service. Only as a last resort, if they meet the program's criteria, will Niagara EMS staff call a taxi.
- All trips must originate and terminate within Niagara Region, and the vast majority have been for short trips within the same municipality (average of 9.7 km from destination).
- Only Niagara EMS Community Paramedicine teams can use the taxi service for transport to future medical appointments, since they proactively serve a rostered caseload of patients with whom they interact on a regular basis.

Early Outcomes

- Since the pilot launched on December 31, 2021, it has been used eighty-four times by our Emergency Communications Nurses and twenty-two times by Mobile Integrated Health staff working with rostered clients in the Community Paramedicine programs.
- Residents from nine of Niagara's twelve local area municipalities have made use of the taxi service.
- Patient satisfaction has been high for this new taxi service, with no adverse patient outcomes reported.

Financial Impacts

- As per Municipal Benchmarking Network Canada (MBNC) in 2018, Niagara EMS Operating Cost per Patient Transported was \$1,006.
- By deferring an EMS transport to the emergency department, there are also additional costs saved to the health care system. For each patient that is diverted from an emergency department, there are additional savings to the hospital system of approximately \$276.00/visit (as per the Niagara Health System Annual Report 2019/20).
- Since the launch of the pilot on December 31, 2021, the average cost of a taxi trip has been \$15-\$20.
- Based on usage from Q1 2022, a conservative annual forecast of two hundred ambulance transports to the emergency department were diverted and twenty diversions away from the emergency department entirely would result in \$206,720 in offset expenditures to Niagara's healthcare system, from an investment of less than \$10,000.

Next Steps

- Ongoing communication with Central Taxi to address operational and customer service issues as they arise.
- Formal checkpoint meetings with Central Taxi management every three months to discuss bigger picture quality improvement opportunities.