
Subject: Extension of Ministry of Health Dedicated Offload Health Care Provider Funding Initiative

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Recommendations

1. That the Regional Chair **BE DIRECTED** to write to the Ontario Minister of Health, Deputy Minister, Associate Deputy Minister for Health Integration & Partnerships, and the Assistant Deputy Minister for Emergency Health Services to express disappointment that the Ministry will not consider the question of whether the Emergency Department Technician (ED Tech) is an acceptable health care provider to receive funding in accordance with the Offload Health Care Provider program, and to urge reconsideration of this decision.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to update and request support from Council regarding the Dedicated Offload Health Care Provider Program (DOHCPP).
- The DOHCPP is a grant of provincial funding for emergency departments to hire health care providers that can take-over care of patients to prevent 'offload delay'. The funding flows through Niagara Emergency Medical Services (NEMS) for distribution to Niagara Health (NH).
- The Niagara Region and NH entered into an Offload Delay Nurse agreement dated April 1, 2016, pursuant to an Offload Funding Agreement from the Province dated December 1, 2008. At the time, the program only permitted hospitals to hire Registered Nurses to relieve offloads.
- Council has previously approved the ongoing receipt of provincial funding for this program, and delegated to staff the authority to enter into relevant agreements.
- Pursuant to a change in the funding rules that now permit other health care workers to be hired to relieve offloads, NEMS is negotiating an updated agreement with NH with a specific focus utilizing a broader mix of health care professionals as part of this funding as an alternative to nurses who can take over care of patients on offload delay. In the current highly competitive health care employment environment, a mix of health care professionals is likely easier to recruit and hire than a nurse, and would potentially allow hiring a larger number of professionals that could make this program more impactful.

- Recently, NH has developed the ED Tech position. The ED Tech is staffed by trained or retired paramedics who are employed directly by NH.
- Thus far, the use of ED Techs has proven to be effective at relieving offload delays.
- The Ministry of Health communicated on February 16, 2023, that while ED Techs are eligible for funding through this program with Ministry approval, the Ministry is not going to “consider” the question of whether the Ministry would be willing to approve funding ED Techs under this program. The Ministry is thereby declining to make a decision as per the Offload Funding Agreement.

Financial Considerations

NEMS is acting as a flow-through agency only and no extra financial or personnel resources will be required for this project. The Niagara Region previously signed By-law No. 97-2013 (Appendix 1 to Report PHD 2-2023) which authorized staff to negotiate the renewal of a contract on behalf of the Niagara Region for the hiring of nursing staff within NH to address offload delays.

In accordance with the Offload Funding Agreement dated November 16, 2022, the Ministry of Health will provide the Niagara Region \$817,662.00, for the 2022-2023 fiscal period. The Niagara Region will only distribute this amount as a maximum to NH, and as such, this program will remain budget-neutral for Niagara Region.

Given the shortage of nurses, in the last two years, Niagara Health has had difficulty securing nurses to fill the offload nursing program, and so funds from the Offload Nursing Program have had to be returned to the Ministry of Health.

The expansion of eligible health care providers that this program can fund is a welcome update that reflects Ontario’s health human resources challenges. However, since the Ministry has not approved ED Techs as eligible for the funding and the approved health care providers are in short supply, likely funding received by the Ministry as part of the updated Offload Funding Agreement will be returned to the Ministry again this coming year.

Analysis

The Province’s Dedicated Offload Health Care Provider program provides some additional support in managing offload delays. NEMS has measured only a small impact of this program on offload delays. Nonetheless, NEMS appreciates the province’s ongoing investment in this program for the help it does provide.

This program permits for the hiring of health care providers to care specifically for patients brought in by ambulance in the Emergency Departments at the St. Catharines, Welland County, and Greater Niagara General Sites of NH. The Ministry of Health's intent is that Dedicated Offload Health Care Providers accept care of the EMS patients, thus freeing up ambulance resources back into the community.

The Ministry of Health on behalf of the Province updated the Offload Funding Agreement in 2022 to expand the definition of Dedicated Ambulance Patient Offload Position to include "*any other category of health care provider that may be approved in writing by the Province to the Recipient as eligible for Funding*". Therefore, the Offload Funding Agreement should allow other trained healthcare professionals to care for patients during the offload process, in addition to the current Nurse positions.

The Niagara Region executed the updated Offload Funding Agreement on November 16, 2022. Given recent challenges in recruiting nurses, NEMS has been working with NH with a specific focus on utilizing a broader mix of health care professionals as part of this funding.

On February 16, 2023, the Ministry of Health wrote to NEMS that notwithstanding the Ministry indicating that other health care providers are eligible to be funded under the Offload Funding Agreement with written approval, the Ministry is not going to "consider" the question of approving the ED Tech position (or any other category of health care provider). Without such approval, this effective ED Tech initiative could be at risk for discontinuation. Currently, NH has been paying for the ED Techs but was hoping to utilize the additional funding from the Ministry to sustain the use of this effective initiative given current health care funding pressures.

Niagara Region and NH are seeking a meeting with the Ministry later this March to explain the ED Tech initiative, however there is no indication that the Ministry will open consideration of funding ED Techs as a consequence of this meeting.

Alternatives Reviewed

This funding represents 'pass-through' funding that is intended to reduce offload delays. Not continuing to leverage this provincial funding will increase offload delays resulting in worse health outcomes for Niagara residents and more pressure on the regional levy to manage offload delays. While this funding constitutes an insufficient response to the offload delay issue, it has a positive impact and is recommended to continue. It should be noted that this program is not tied to any outcome measures that demonstrate

effectiveness. While it may be difficult to demonstrate the impact on offload delay if these funds were not available, it may be advantageous to align this funding to outcome measures that demonstrate reduction in offload delays. It is unlikely that the Region has the authority to impose such a stipulation, and this may have to be a matter for referral to the Ministry of Health for review.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

The Offload Health Care Provider program utilizes provincial funding to decrease offload delays that Niagara patients experience, and that incur pressure on Niagara Region's levy. Therefore, this report aligns with Council's strategic priorities for a Healthy and Vibrant Community as well as for Sustainable and Engaging Government.

Other Pertinent Reports

Previous Memoranda of Agreement between Niagara Region and the Ministry of Health for funding associated with an Emergency Department Health Care Provider initiative was approved in:

- PHD 14-2008
- PHD 12-2009
- PHD 15-2011
- PHD 18-2011
- PHD 33-2012
- PHD 17-2013

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Niagara Region By-law No. 97-2013 to Authorize the Region's Acceptance of Funding for Offload Nursing Staff from the MOHLTC

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA

BY-LAW NO. 97-2013

A BY-LAW TO AUTHORIZE THE REGION'S
ACCEPTANCE OF FUNDING FOR
OFFLOAD NURSING STAFF FROM THE MOHLTC

WHEREAS the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (the "MOHLTC") has committed to a funding initiative which will allow the hiring of offload nursing staff for a specific time period until March 31, 2014 or as extended in the MOHLTC's discretion, similar to that set out in a draft Agreement between the MOHLTC and The Regional Municipality of Niagara ("the Region") attached to and reported in PHD 60-2008 dated November 18, 2008 ("the previous Agreement"),

AND WHEREAS the Region, under this initiative, will be the recipient of up to \$826,505 per year to be used to hire offload nursing staff, which monies are to be distributed to the Niagara Health Service as payment for services received from the offload delay nurse program,

AND WHEREAS the MOHLTC has stipulated that in order to be eligible to receive the aforesaid funds a by-law authorizing the Region's participation in this initiative must be received prior to implementation of this initiative and a new or renewal agreement with the MOHLTC must be entered into and a new or renewal contract with the Niagara Health Service for provision of the nursing services must be entered into,

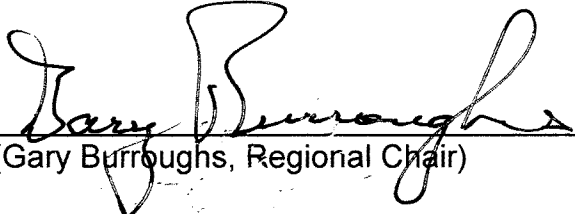
NOW THEREFORE the Council of The Regional Municipality of Niagara enacts as follows:

1. That the Region is authorized to accept the funding to hire offload nursing staff for the prescribed term of an agreement or agreement renewal to be negotiated with the MOHLTC and to distribute the funding to the Niagara Health System as payment for services received from the offload delay nurse program in a similar manner to that set out in Article 4 of the previous Agreement and per the terms of the new or renewal contract to be negotiated with the Niagara Health System;
2. That the Region is authorized to enter into a new or renewal agreement with the MOHLTC so that the funding can be procured, and that the Chair and Clerk are authorized to execute such new or renewal agreement upon its finalization by staff;


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3. That Senior Management for Emergency Medical Services is authorized to negotiate a new or renewal contract on behalf of the Region with the Niagara Health System for the hiring of nursing staff within the Niagara Health System Emergency Departments to address offload delays and that the Chair and Clerk are authorized to execute such new or renewal contract upon its preparation in a form approved by Legal Services;
4. That a copy of this by-law be forwarded to the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, in order to commence the implementation of this new term of the offload delay nurse program funding initiative; and
5. That this by-law shall come into force on the date it is passed.

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF NIAGARA



(Gary Burroughs, Regional Chair)



(Janet Pilon, Regional Clerk)

Passed: September 20, 2013