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**Subject:** Ontario Seniors Dental Care Plan

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, April 4, 2023

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## Recommendations

1. That Public Health staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to reallocate funds between contracted service delivery partners based on local needs, and their ability to maximize funding.

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to obtain approval for Niagara Region Public Health (NRPH) to have the authority, as the local systems administrator, to reallocate funding between contracted service delivery partners in order to maximize use of provincial funding and serve as many Niagara residents as possible.
- In April 2019, the province announced creation of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care program.
- Niagara Region Public Health became the local service administrator under this program, and through contracting local partners, the first services were offered at Niagara College in Welland (interim provider) and Quest Community Health Centre, in St. Catharines.
- As of December 2021, following the approval of the 100% provincially funded capital campaign to construct full-scale dental operatories, Niagara now has four service delivery sites across the region, offering preventive and restorative services to eligible seniors. The four delivery sites are Quest Community Health Centre in St. Catharines, the Niagara Falls Community Health Centre in Niagara Falls, Centre de sante de Communautaire in Welland, and Niagara Region Public Health office in Fort Erie.
- Demand for service is high and there are sizeable waitlist for service; the provincial funding for the program does not currently meet the community need.
- Local service provider partners have not always managed to see their expected volume of clients; some trend lower than expected while others trend higher than expected. Reallocating funds from those seeing a lower volume to those seeing a higher volume has been a slow and cumbersome legal process requiring multiple approvals; these pose barriers to maximize use of funds to treat as many seniors as possible.

- Following two years of pandemic impacted service, and considerable provincial wait lists for service, the Ministry of Health increased funding to local public health for community-based delivery of the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program. This equates to funding for additional resources within the system, and enhanced funding for dentures and personal protective equipment.

## **Financial Considerations**

In year receipt of funding must comply with by-law 2017-63, Budget Control, items 6.6(a) and 6.6(b), requiring Council's approval for any amounts received in excess of \$1 million for operating programs. The Ontario Seniors Dental Care program is 100% provincially funded with \$2,515,900 annualized funding in 2022. This funding supports 20.35 permanent full time equivalent (FTE) positions to deliver the services across Niagara. Non-salaried costs are operating costs associated with direct service delivery, including sub-contracted providers for dentures and oral surgery/speciality services, as well as dental sundries, supplies, instruments and personal protective equipment. As per Ministry of Health agreements, any unspent funds must be returned to the Ministry at year-end. The ongoing annual provincial funding of \$2,515,900 per year will constitute base funding for this program in future years' budgets as a fully provincially funded program with no levy contribution required. As local system administrators, NRPH staff will assess local need, monitor utilization, and reallocate funds to community partners to optimize service delivery across the region.

## **Analysis**

Currently, preventive and restorative service for eligible seniors are available five days a week at Quest Community Health Centre in St. Catharines, and Centre de Santé Communautaire in Welland, 2.5-5 days a week in Niagara Falls at the Niagara Falls Community Health Centre, and two days a week in Fort Erie.

The program also includes four dental health community workers that provide navigational support to clients and prospective clients, and assist them with issues related to the application process, income tax filings, completing required paperwork, and accessing appointments. The dental health community workers in Niagara also promote the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program within their local community and assist those not eligible in finding alternative treatment options. All service delivery sites have an associated dental health community worker, with the exception of NRPH, which instead works collaboratively with a Bridges Community Health Centre staff member who supports the Fort Erie/Port Colborne/Wainfleet communities.

In 2022, all four Ontario Seniors Dental Care program sites provided 3,708 appointments to 1,508 clients. As of February 15, 2023, there was 277 people on a wait list for service in Niagara. In 2022, 150 clients received some form of dentures, and 42 were recipients of oral surgery services.

Niagara Region Public Health has also been partially funded for the replacement of a mobile dental unit that can support the Ontario Seniors Dental Care program in more remote communities where fixed clinics are difficult to access, or transportation is considered a barrier.

Niagara Region has annually entered into service level agreements with local Community Health Centres, with each site following the directives of the Ministry. When demands at some sites are greater than others, Public Health has sought to shift funds between sites to maximize service to Niagara's seniors and keep waitlists short. Currently our service level agreements need to be opened and reviewed by multiple parties to allow movement of funds between the partners each time. This process wastes valuable time and resources that results in vulnerable seniors not receiving dentures or other dental services in a timely manner, results in wait lists growing, and may result in sending unspent budget back to the province.

Niagara Region Public Health requires the ability to shift resources without formally renegotiating the service level agreement each time. By monitoring and assessing the budgets of service providers, Public Health can then efficiently reallocate funds to ensure the maximization of service to Niagara's residents within the provincial funding envelope, within a service year.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

By NRPH not being able to reallocate funding when possible, there is a risk of not maximizing funding, resulting in not being able to provide additional specialty services, such as dentures and oral surgery, to as many Niagara residents as possible.

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

As one demographic of our diverse community, ensuring the oral health of a low-income seniors population, will work towards achieving a Healthy and Vibrant Community

## Other Pertinent Reports

- PHD 14-2018
- PHD 06-2022

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## Appendices

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