

**MEMORANDUM**

**COM-C 27-2023**

**Subject:** One Time Funding from Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services in Response to Asylum Seeker Arrivals in Niagara

**Date:** April 4, 2023

**To:** Public Health & Social Services Committee

**From:** Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

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**Background**

The purpose of this memo is to provide information on the outcome of a one-time funding request to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) in response to unprecedented asylum seeker arrivals in Niagara. The federal Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) began sheltering asylum seekers, through hoteling, in Niagara in July 2022. Since that time, the number of IRCC contracted hotel rooms has increased from 87 rooms to over 2000 rooms. Individuals arriving in Niagara are eligible for assistance under Ontario Works, a provincial income support program administered by Niagara Region's Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) division. As a result, Niagara's Ontario Works caseload is projected to increase 22% by April 2023.

**Situation to Date**

From July 2022 to March 2023, Niagara has received 5,254 asylum seeker claimants, 2,766 of whom have arrived since the beginning of 2023. Arriving asylum seekers are from 82 different nationalities and speak 54 different languages.

With the influx of asylum seekers, SAEO continues to experience significant pressure in responding to new Social Assistance applicants with requests for assistance increasing by 44% over 2021. Furthermore, the SAEO caseload realized a 15.3% increase from December 2021 to December 2022, significantly higher than the forecasted increase of 9%. By April 2023, Niagara's SAEO caseload is projected to increase by a total of 22%.

In order to respond to the extraordinary increased demand for service, SAEO realigned existing resources and created additional specialized caseloads that offer dedicated case management supports responding to the unique challenges faced by the

newcomer population. Regional staff also submitted a one-time funding request to MCCSS of \$5,959,200, as further increases in hotel contracts were announced by IRCC, requesting both funding for staff resources and client benefits.

On March 28, 2023, SAEO received written confirmation from MCCSS regarding approved one-time funding, of \$857,250 to assist this team to support asylum seekers. Funding is to be spent by December 31, 2023. This funding will better position staff to deliver Ontario Works to an increasing caseload by hiring twelve temporary staff. On March 7, 2023, Report [COM 9-2023 Asylum Seekers Transferred to Niagara Falls - Request for Immediate Temporary Funding](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=30317) (<https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=30317>), was presented to Committee identifying the need to immediately reallocate \$310,000 of budget from Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) in order to hire temporary staff to address the caseload increase. As funding has now become available, these provincial dollars will first fund these costs and the NPI budget will be replenished. SAEO is pending confirmation of 100% provincial funding to support additional client benefits for asylum seekers, funds that would assist with rent deposits, bus passes and phone service.

SAEO staff continue to meet regularly with IRCC to discuss the evolving situation. SAEO also participates in regular meetings with community partners to ensure asylum seekers receive necessary supports and services, to the extent that they are available and appropriate, that will lead to successful integration in our community. Weekly information sessions held in Niagara Falls with community partners provide general information and one to one supports for asylum seekers.

It should be noted, that while these funds are welcome, should the demands on service remain at current levels, further funding will be required to support operations and respond to other costs such as interpreter services. However, the pressures in Niagara Falls may diminish over the months ahead due to the changes to federal rules associated with irregular border crossings that were implemented on March 24, 2023. Staff commit to continue to monitor and report to Council on the impacts of the IRCC operation in Niagara Falls, and the associated service and financial pressures.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

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Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE  
Commissioner, Community Services