
Subject: Emergency Social Services – Canadian Red Cross Contract / Agreement

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, September 10, 2024

Recommendations

1. That the Regional Chair and Regional Clerk **BE AUTHORIZED** to execute an agreement with the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) for the provision of Emergency Social Services for a term of three years, effective January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2027, in a form that is satisfactory to the Director of Legal and Court Services.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval to execute an agreement with the CRC that seeks to build capacity for the provision of Emergency Social Services within the region to ensure that the desired level of service would be available in the event of an emergency.
- Niagara Region is legislatively required by the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act 2.1 (1), as a municipality, to develop and implement an emergency management program that includes an Emergency Response Plan. The emergency plan shall include procedures to be taken for the safety or evacuation of persons in an emergency area.
- Niagara Region's Homelessness Services and Community Engagement division within Community Services Department is responsible for leading the planning and delivery of the Region's Emergency Social Services plan to address how to respond in the event of a community disaster where residents are being displaced from their homes, ensuring agreements are developed and in place in collaboration with local area municipalities and external partners.
- Historically, the Region has held a contract/agreement with the CRC for emergency response disaster relief to support this mandate. The current agreement with CRC expires December 31, 2024. Costs associated with an emergency response are in addition to the annual fee. As there is no way to predetermine the size and scope of an emergency, a range for these costs cannot be provided. Thus, it was determined in partnership with Legal Services, that Council approval would be the appropriate level of approval.

Financial Considerations

The annual contribution to the Canadian Red Cross under an agreement with the Region would be \$55,000 (\$43,000 for the current contract) for each year of a three-year agreement. Red Cross establishes this fee based on the Region's approximate population (525,000) and is the sum of an estimated \$0.10 per capita. Red Cross is in the process of increasing this fee to \$0.15 per capita to reflect increased costs and response activity across all communities. Considering population growth and rising costs, this represents an adjustment from the previous contract.

In the event of an emergency response, services would be determined by the Region in partnership with the local municipality, where it is considered a municipal emergency. The costs associated with the response are in addition to the annual fee to ensure capacity to respond and the appropriate planning. These additional costs incurred during a response include lodging, food, supplies, out of town volunteer expenses and other direct costs of a Canadian Red Cross response. There is no way to predetermine the size and scope of an emergency, and as such, a range for these costs cannot be provided. Reporting of costs during an emergency would be managed in accordance with the Procurement By-Law Special Circumstances Purchases Section 17 (c) (ii) requiring "the Commissioner of Corporate Services/Treasurer, as soon as possible in the circumstances proceeds with identifying and approving or seeking approval of the funds required to pay for the Special Circumstance", should funds not be available within the Region's operating budget.

Analysis

Emergency Social Services involve the coordination of essential services to individuals who are evacuated during an emergency, and are composed of six basic services:

1. **Registration and Inquiry:** The collection and management of evacuees' personal information, inquiries regarding evacuees' safety and family reunification.
2. **Emergency Feeding:** The provision of meals, snacks, and beverages to evacuees without food or food preparation facilities. This can be provided through a third party arrangement, such as the Salvation Army.
3. **Emergency Lodging:** The provision of safe and temporary lodging to evacuees, including overnight sleeping arrangements. This may include hotels or group lodging arrangements.
4. **Emergency Clothing:** The provision of clothing and footwear until regular sources of supply are available.

5. Personal Services: The provision of additional supports to evacuees that are more specialized (e.g. personal and hygiene products, baby supplies, mobility aids, etc.).
6. Management of Reception Centres where overnight accommodation is not required, however information sharing, registration and inquiry, emergency feeding and some personal services may be provided.

Homelessness Services and Community Engagement Division within Niagara Region's Community Services Department is responsible for coordinating Emergency Social Services in collaboration with local municipalities and external providers, such as non-profit groups and businesses that provide a specific service to evacuees during an emergency.

Historically, the CRC has been a key partner in the delivery of a range of Emergency Social Services throughout Niagara region, and has responded to local events such as: the 'Christmas blizzard', the St. Catharines industrial fire, the Grimsby downtown fire, and the Port Colborne water system failure.

The CRC has a reputation worldwide for providing Emergency Social Services response during emergencies of all sizes and types. As such, the CRC has staff and volunteers available to respond, as requested, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and can mobilize quickly in an emergency situation. As the industry leaders in this specialized response, many municipalities and provinces hold agreements with the CRC to support responses to emergencies.

Under the Agreement, the CRC will collaborate and partner with the Region in preparedness activities including participation in emergency exercises, assessments of facilities for evacuation centres, training activities, recruitment of volunteers, pre-positioning of emergency sheltering supplies and the delivery of personal preparedness workshops to community groups upon request.

Municipalities with formalized agreements have priority (relatively to other municipalities who do not have agreements) in terms of receiving emergency response and this is pertinent, particularly for large-scale incidents impacting broader geographic areas. In order to ensure Niagara Region is equipped to respond to a local emergency, where coordination of essential services to individuals who are evacuated during an emergency is required, it is recommended that the Region enter into a formal agreement with the CRC.

Alternatives Reviewed

While Red Cross is the internationally recognized expert in Emergency Social Services responses, the Region did consider the alternative of offering the program in-house. The requirements to be prepared to offer the breadth of emergency services including family reunification, lodging, food and personal needs/supports would require: a significant investment in physical assets (e.g. cots, blankets, comfort kits); software and policies to address family reunification; standby staffing and training to provide needed support during the emergency; and procurement support to establish preferred vendors to address hoteling, food supports and personal needs. Based on this analysis, the annual retainer with the Red Cross, of \$55,000, cost-effectively provides for the required capacity and expertise to ensure the best response in an emergency for the residents of Niagara. A contract with the Red Cross ensures that there is a standing ability to respond in a scalable fashion to address both a smaller emergency as well as a larger situation with a significant community impact. Staff therefore are recommending that Niagara Region execute an agreement with the Canadian Red Cross to provide Emergency Social Services in partnership with Community Services in the event of an emergency impacting the residents of Niagara.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

This report supports the council priority of an Equitable Region by providing access to emergency social service supports for all residents.

Other Pertinent Reports

[COM 25-2021 - Emergency Social Services Canadian Red Cross Contract Agreement](https://pub-niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=19583)
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