
Subject: Niagara Region Application for Built for Zero Canada

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 11, 2019

Recommendations

That council **ENDORSE** a Niagara Region application to participate in Built for Zero Canada, a campaign to end chronic homelessness.

Key Facts

- Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) is a Canadian movement, led by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH), which supports participating Canadian communities to achieve a 'Functional Zero' end to chronic homelessness.
- A Functional Zero end to chronic homelessness is achieved when there are three or less people experiencing chronic homelessness in a given community, sustained over three consecutive months, as measured through a quality By-Name List (including single adults, youth and families).
- Niagara Region has been invited, through a targeted solicitation process, to submit an application by June 28, 2019 to be one of up to eight additional communities selected by CAEH to join the BFZ-C movement in the fall of 2019.
- Participation in BFZ-C would provide access to a variety of resources that would support Niagara Region to achieve a Functional Zero end to chronic homelessness, exceeding its required targets set by federal and provincial funders.
- An anticipated immediate direct cost of \$17,500 to participate in BFZ-C from September 2019 to June 2020 can be covered by the existing Homelessness Services budget.
- Program enhancements or additions to community based services that may be identified through participation in BFZ-C, or resulting budget implications, to achieve Functional Zero have not been included in this report as they would be determined through participation and would occur beyond the initial commitment period ending June 2020.

Financial Considerations

The anticipated immediate direct cost to Niagara Region to participate in Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) from September 2019 to June 2020 is \$17,500. This cost includes:

- Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH) Fee – As a community with a population between 350,000-500,000, the fee for Niagara to participate in BFZ-C from September 2019 to June 2020 would be \$7,500.

- Cost for staff to attend in-person learning sessions outside of Niagara twice per year, with an estimated total cost of \$10,000.

It is expected that the immediate direct cost of participation can be covered by the existing 2019 Homelessness Services budget. Additional costs associated with key model components of BFZ-C are already included in the Homelessness Services budget and are financially supported by federal Reaching Home funding. These components include:

- Housing First approach
- Quality By-Name List
- Coordinated Access System, and
- Web-based homelessness information management system shared across homelessness services providers (HIFIS).

It should be noted that Homelessness Services is anticipating a 2020 budget pressure of an estimated \$800,000 to maintain existing service levels as provided during 2019.

The limited amount of provincial and federal funding Niagara receives for Homelessness Services remains a concern, with Niagara receiving amounts well below its comparators. Community Services continues to communicate, through its associations and with ministry staff, the ongoing needs of the Niagara community. For example, for 2019-2020, Niagara will receive \$9.2 million in provincial and federal funding, or 35.2% of Hamilton's allocation, (totaling \$26.1 million). For comparison, Niagara's population is 60% of that of Hamilton, and Niagara's social assistance caseload is 83% of that of Hamilton.

The cost of any program enhancements or additions to community based services that may be identified through participation in BFZ-C, to achieve Functional Zero have not been included in this report as they would be determined through participation and would occur beyond the initial commitment period ending June 2020. The associated costs would be considered as part of the 2021 budget process, should council decide to continue with the commitment.

As part of the application process, Niagara Region will be required to provide evidence of local investment that is committed to the objective of achieving a Functional Zero end to chronic homelessness. This requirement would be satisfied by the current levy contribution.

Analysis

Niagara Region has been invited, through a targeted solicitation process, to submit an application to participate in the Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) movement led by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (CAEH). The application deadline is June 28, 2019. If successful, Niagara Region would be one of up to eight additional communities

selected by CAEH to join the BFZ-C movement in the fall of 2019. Communities will be selected based on their demonstrated interest and understanding of what it means to be involved in BFZ-C and the strength of their application. Preference will be given to communities who are Reaching Home Designated (in receipt of federal Reaching Home funding) and those applying to be Reaching Home Designated that have been invited to the targeted solicitation process.

The CAEH launched BFZ-C in March of 2019 with 24 participating communities from across Canada. Initial participation was open to communities which participated in the previous 20,000 Homes campaign. The current application process allows up to eight communities that were not part of 20,000 Homes to apply to be part of BFZ-C. After Niagara received an invitation to apply, staff from Homelessness Services participated in a webinar hosted by CAEH in April 2019 to learn about the process to apply to participate in BFZ-C as well as the cost and expectations of participation.

BFZ-C is based on the Built for Zero movement in the United States. The initiative is a rigorous national change effort working to help a core group of committed communities end chronic homelessness through a national effort that supports participating communities in developing real time data on homelessness, optimizing local housing resources, tracking progress against monthly goals, and accelerating the spread of proven strategies. In the United States, three participating communities have measurably and sustainably ended chronic homelessness, more than 64 participating communities have achieved real time By-Name data on local homeless populations and more than 38 participating communities are driving measurable reductions in homelessness month over month.¹ In March 2019 the CAEH introduced the Built for Zero model to Canada in order to support participating Canadian communities to achieve a Functional Zero end to chronic homelessness by the end of 2022.

The Definition and Target of Functional Zero Chronic Homelessness

BFZ-C uses a specific measurable definition for a functional end to chronic homelessness:

Functional Zero chronic homelessness is achieved when there are three or less people experiencing chronic homelessness, sustained over three consecutive months, as measured through a quality By-Name List (including single adults, youth and families).

A Functional Zero end to chronic homelessness means that a community has a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness (unsheltered homeless, emergency sheltered homeless, provisionally accommodated or imminent risk of homelessness) is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-

¹ Built for Zero. (2019) Retrieved from <https://www.community.solutions/what-we-do/built-for-zero>

recurring experience. A strong community system has ample time to connect people to housing before they meet the chronic definition, which means a definitive zero (or very close) on chronic homelessness should be possible.

- *Homeless*: In the BFZ-C model everyone is considered “homeless” the day they ‘hit’ the streets;
- *Chronically homeless*: People are considered chronically homeless when they have gone without a home for more than 180 days in the past year, or 18 months in the past three years.

The definitions of homelessness and chronic homelessness used by BFZ-C closely reflect the Canadian definition of homelessness created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) and used by *Reaching Home: Canada’s Homelessness Strategy Directives*. BFZ-C follows the Government of Canada definition of chronic homelessness, although communities are encouraged to focus on housing people who are chronically homeless as well as those with the highest acuity of need. Niagara Region Homelessness Services has already adopted these definitions of homelessness.

The Federal government articulated in “*A Place to Call Home (2017)*” a target of reducing chronic homelessness among shelter users by 50% over ten years. The Province of Ontario has identified in its “*Long Term Affordable Housing Strategic Update (2016)*” a goal of ending chronic homelessness by 2025. The BFZ-C timeline for achieving a Functional Zero end to chronic homelessness is shorter than the Federal or Provincial timelines. BFZ-C communities will be expected to achieve and maintain a Functional Zero end to chronic homelessness by 2022.

Functional Zero is different from an absolute end to homelessness. An absolute end to homelessness refers to a true end to homelessness, where everyone has access to supports and appropriate housing so that no one becomes homeless (unsheltered homeless, sheltered homeless, or provisionally accommodated) or at risk in the first place. Communities that have achieved and are maintaining Functional Zero may still observe people “in the streets” that are either experiencing or perceived to be experiencing homelessness.

Benefits of Participation

Participating communities will receive a variety of coaching and learning opportunities tailored to their local context and current progress, including:

- Two annual in-person learning sessions
- On-site and virtual coaching
- An online resource package and toolkit and webinars
- Peer learning, knowledge sharing and support from other BFZ-C communities.

It is anticipated that the additional resources accessed through participation in BFZ-C would support Niagara Region to meet and exceed the Provincial target of ending chronic homelessness by 2025 and the Federal target of reducing chronic homelessness among shelter users by 50% by 2027.

Commitment and Expectations of Participating Communities

The initial commitment period is from September 2019 to June 2020. After that time, participating communities will have the first opportunity to renew for July 2020 to March 2022.

BFZ-C acknowledges that no one knows exactly what it will take to end chronic homelessness in Canada. Participating communities join a group of skilled solution-oriented problem-solvers who are interested in working together on this challenge. To be successful, the BFZ-C approach requires a certain collective mindset which includes a bias for action, willingness to grow, celebrating and learning from failures, focus on solutions, and commitment to do what it takes to end chronic homelessness.

Participating communities must commit to identify local leads, attend in-person learning sessions, submit monthly chronic homeless data, participate in monthly coaching, and submit quarterly scorecards while working towards a quality By-Name List and quality Coordinated Access System. Communities must also want to learn from and share with other participating communities. Communities must be committed to ending chronic homelessness (using the BFZ-C Functional Zero chronic homelessness definition).

Niagara Region is well-positioned to participate in the BFZ-C model. Homelessness Services has already implemented or is planning to implement the key system components shared by BFZ-C communities. Niagara Region's application will also require evidence of local investment that is committed to the objective of achieving a Functional Zero end to chronic homelessness. Investment can take the form of levy funding which council already contributes, social housing stock or community third party investment.

Alternatives Reviewed

If Niagara Region is unsuccessful in an application to participate in BFZ-C, Community Services would continue to implement the best practice components of a Built for Zero model without the additional support provided by the CAEH through BFZ-C.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Not applicable (pending the development of Council's new Strategic Priorities).

Other Pertinent Reports

Not applicable.

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