

Subject: Reaching Home Program Enhancement

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, January 7, 2025

Recommendations

1. That Regional Council **APPROVE** the addition of one (1) permanent Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) fully funded by an increase in base funding to the Federal Reaching Home Program.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the recent announcement of an increase in funding of \$863,183 per annum as part of the Federal Reaching Home Program for the homelessness system in Niagara.
- Seek approval for the addition of one (1) full-time permanent position as per the Corporate Delegation of Authority Policy.

Financial Considerations

Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada (HICC) has announced an increase in year over year base funding to the Reaching Home program. Niagara Region will receive an additional \$0.86 million for 2025 and 2026, increasing the annual allocation from \$3.67 million to \$4.53 million. Niagara will receive a further increase in 2027 and 2028 increasing the annual allocation to \$4.7 million. A budget adjustment to the Niagara Region 2025 operating budget to reflect the increased funding will be processed in accordance with Budget Control By-Law 2017-63, section 6.6(a) for amounts not exceeding \$1 million.

Enhanced Reaching Home funding includes a provision to allocate up to 15% (\$129,477) for staffing costs to support effective service delivery. Homelessness Services staff have reviewed the pressures and opportunities and recommend the addition of one full-time homelessness specialist position estimated at \$110,000, inclusive of salary and benefits.

The additional FTE and service programming enhancements are fully supported by the incremental funding with no levy increase.

Additionally, since the funding is retroactive to April 1, 2024, there is an opportunity to fund expenses budgeted to be levy-funded in 2024. These savings will be reflected in the 2024 year-end operating results for Community Services.

Analysis

Reaching Home, a federal homelessness program, is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness. It provides funding to communities across Canada to help address local homelessness needs. The Reaching Home program supports the most vulnerable people across Niagara in maintaining safe, stable, and affordable housing and supports strategies to reduce chronic homelessness in line with the goals of the National Housing Strategy.

Reaching Home Base Funding Increase

Reaching Home helps to fund the Housing First¹ program, the Home for Good² program and the outreach³ program. The enhanced funding is a welcome support to continue to focus on decreasing the number of people experiencing homelessness in Niagara Region.

A priority for homelessness services is to ensure flow in the shelter system. In 2024 homelessness services supported 991 people to move from emergency shelter to housing, 330 people to move from unsheltered homelessness to emergency shelter, and 50 people to move directly from unsheltered homelessness to housing. Rent subsidy support is a key tool in effectively decreasing the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness that currently use shelters and in achieving housing

¹ Housing First: a program to move people experiencing homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness, rapidly from the street or emergency shelters into stable and long-term housing with supports.

² Home for Good: a supportive housing program for clients who are homeless with complex needs who require multiple supports.

³ Niagara Assertive Street Outreach: engages with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to minimize the harmful effects and helps individuals work towards long-term care housing solutions.

outcomes. Staff have identified priority populations for which a housing subsidy could support an exit from shelter into independent living, thereby freeing up shelter space for others in community, creating capacity in the existing shelters and thereby not requiring further investment to increase shelter capacity across Niagara. The enhanced Reaching Home funding provides an opportunity to develop additional housing subsidy programs for priority populations.

To effectively administer funds and continue to achieve outcomes in a timely fashion staff recommend taking advantage of the funding announcement provision to allocate up to 15% (\$129,477) for staffing costs to support effective service delivery. Homelessness Services staff have reviewed the pressures and opportunities and recommend the addition of one full-time homelessness specialist position estimated at \$110,000, inclusive of salary and benefits.

Alternatives Reviewed

Alternative 1:

Homelessness Services recognizes that there are many competing priorities for any additional funding that comes available. Based on best practice, speed to operationalize, and identified system gaps and opportunities, investment in housing subsidies has been identified as the preferred option to achieve target outcomes. This option also aligns with the 2023 OrgCode Shelter Capacity Review recommendations.

Alternative 2:

Homelessness Services also utilizes funding from the Provincial Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) alongside the Reaching Home program to support its wide range of programs and services. Report CSD 64-2024 – 2025 Consolidated General Levy Budget, outlines programs with incremental levy investments in mandated services provided under provincial and federal agreements, including the HPP and Reaching Home programs. The incremental levy investment for these programs is estimated to be \$4 million in 2025. An alternative considered was using this base funding increase to reduce this incremental levy investment, but this option has not been recommended given the demand for homeless services.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Effective Region – Deliver fiscally responsible and sustainable core services.

Effective Region – Invest and support an aligned workforce at Niagara Region.

Other Pertinent Reports

[COM 21-2023 Homeless Shelter Capacity Review](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jun06_2023/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2021-2023%20Homeless%20Shelter%20Capacity%20Review.pdf)

[Niagara Region Shelter Capacity May 2023](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_Jun06_2023/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%20A%20-%20Niagara%20Region%20Shelter%20Capacity%20May%202023.pdf)

[CSD 64-2024 Consolidated General Levy Budget](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/CSD%2064-2024%202025%20Consolidated%20General%20Levy%20Budget.pdf)

[Niagara Regional Department Base Budget](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%201%20-%20Niagara%20Region%20Departments%20Base%20Budget.pdf)

[Departmental Program Changes](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%202%20-%20Departmental%20Program%20Changes.pdf)

[CSD 64-2024 Appendix 3](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%203%20-Tax%20Payer%20Relief%20Forecast.pdf)

[Appendix 4 - Capital Levy Projects Allocated Incremental 2.5% Operating Budget Funding](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%204%20-%20Capital%20Projects%20Allocated%20Incremental%20Operating%20Budget%20Funding.pdf)

[Capital Financing Debt Forecast](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%205%20-%20Capital%20Financing%20-%20Debt%20Forecast.pdf)

[Appendix 6 - Debt Substitution Projects](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%206%20-%20Debt%20Substitution%20Projects.pdf)

[Appendix 7 - FTE Summary - Permanent](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%207%20-%20FTE%20Summary%20-%20Permanent.pdf)

[Appendix 8 - Multi-Year Forecast](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%208%20-%20Multi-Year%20Forecast.pdf)

[Appendix 9 - Additional Program Changes not Brought Forward](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%209%20-%20Additional%20Program%20Changes%20Not%20Brought%20Forward.pdf)

[Appendix 10 - 2025 Levy Funding Mandated Services Provided under Provincial and Federal Agreements](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Budget%20Review%20Committee%20of%20the%20Whole_Dec05_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/Appendix%2010%20-%202025%20Levy%20Funding%20for%20Mandated%20Services%20Provided%20Under%20Federal%20and%20Provincial%20Agreements.pdf)

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