
Subject: Emergency Shelter System Capacity

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, October 8, 2019

Recommendations

That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to update Council on measures taken by Homelessness Services to address the anticipated emergency housing needs in the upcoming winter months, and to provide information related to the year-round shelter system capacity.
- Similar to the 2018/2019 year, Niagara Region's Homelessness Services will continue to support two Out of the Cold (OOTC) shelters from November 1, 2019 to April 1-15, 2020, based in St. Catharines and Niagara Falls. OOTC will have the capacity to shelter 70 individuals per night, which is an increase of 15 beds over the 2018/2019 season.
- It is important to note that these seasonal programs are only one mechanism used by Homelessness Services to address emergency shelter pressures. The year-round emergency shelter system, after-hours phone number and overflow moteling are all used to coordinate and respond to individuals experiencing homelessness in Niagara.
- To support successful exits from the shelter system, Homelessness Services also funds best practice models such as Housing First and Home for Good programs, to ensure clients with higher needs are provided with the necessary housing and support services required to obtain and retain housing in the community.
- Beyond emergency-based responses, Homelessness Services invests in prevention and diversion programs which reduce the number of households who otherwise would require emergency shelter. Homelessness Services, aligned with efforts across Canada, is also strategically working towards the long-term goal of ending chronic and high-acuity homelessness through the recent successful application to Built for Zero Canada which will now provide Niagara Region with additional coaching in the adoption of proven practices and strategies to meet this goal.

Financial Considerations

While largely considered a Provincial mandate of responsibility, the limited amount of provincial and federal funding Niagara Region receives for homelessness services remains a concern as Niagara receives amounts well below its comparators. As such,

Community Services continues to communicate, through its associations and with Ministry staff, the ongoing needs of the Niagara community.

Contributions from partner agencies provides considerable and invaluable support to a system that is experiencing significant pressures. The increase of 15 beds to the Out of the Cold program (St. Catharines site) from the 2018 year, is supported by partner agencies and is accommodated within the 2019 Council approved operating budget. Beyond the Out of the Cold program, Homelessness Services funds 151 shelter beds, 30 hotel rooms largely utilized by families, and six three bedroom apartments for families within the year-round shelter system.

The 2019 Homelessness Services gross budget is \$10.8M. Currently, Homelessness Services is anticipating a 2020 budget pressure of an estimated \$800,000 to maintain existing service levels as provided during 2019.

Analysis

Niagara Region's Homelessness Services continues to plan for the seasonal expansion of emergency shelter capacity to ensure adequate resources are available for our most vulnerable citizens in the winter months.

It should be noted that emergency shelter occupancy rates have increased in Niagara (2015: 85%; 2016: 98%; 2017: 108%; and, 2018: 105%) as a result of declining rental vacancy rates of low-market housing, and overall increases in rental rates and housing prices. The below chart provides shelter usage information from 2018 system-level data (i.e. the duration of shelter stays, numbers of unique households who access shelter, and overall shelter usage by client group).

2018 Emergency Shelter Usage				
Duration of stay	# of unique households	% of total households	# of night stays	% of total night stays
0-30 days	1,132	62%	10,804	17%
31-179 days	674	37%	47,133	75%
180+ days	22	1%	5,294	8%

In 2018, 62% of households exited the shelter system within 30 days. Clients staying in shelter who experience *episodic to long-stay homelessness* (31-179 nights in shelter), represented 37% of all households who accessed the emergency shelter system, however, used 75% of the shelter beds. Homelessness Services contracts with service providers to deliver the Housing First program, which is intended to support this client population by providing housing with support services for clients to exit shelter and remain housed. Households defined as *chronically homeless* (180+ nights in shelter) represented only 1% of households who accessed emergency shelter, and used 8% of the shelter beds. Homelessness Services contracts with a small number of service

providers to deliver the Home for Good program, for which Niagara submitted a successful proposal in 2017, to support this last client population which requires more intensive support services to exit shelter and obtain and retain their housing.

In light of current shelter occupancy rates and year-round shelter capacity, and in planning for the increased seasonal demand for shelter, the Region will be increasing the capacity of the Out of the Cold program from 55 to 70 spaces to address local pressures. The OOTC program offers a safe, warm indoor space for individuals to sleep overnight, delivered through contracts with homelessness service providers during the winter season (November to April). The OOTC program aims to respond to the increased demand for homeless shelters and operates from a low-barrier approach to serve people who otherwise may choose not to access emergency shelters during the winter months.

Beyond the 70 beds provided through the OOTC program to meet seasonal needs, Niagara Region's year-round emergency shelter capacity includes: 151 shelter beds, 30 hotel rooms largely utilized by families, and six three bedroom apartments for families. (See Appendix A for further details of the emergency shelter system capacity.) To further support the emergency shelter system, Niagara Region contracts with a service provider to offer a centralized after-hours phone number to coordinate and respond to the demand for shelter, leveraging local motels as an overflow mechanism, as deemed necessary.

It should be noted that currently funded emergency shelter providers contracted by Homelessness Services have identified increased operating pressures to deliver services. Homelessness Services will be entering the next phase of procurement for emergency shelter (including other service areas, such as, outreach, transitional housing, and other supportive housing programs) within the next couple of months (i.e. October/November 2019).

Beyond emergency-based responses to addressing homelessness, Homelessness Services continues to take a number of steps to work towards the long-term goal of ending chronic and high-acuity homelessness. Most recently, the successful application to Built for Zero (a Canadian movement led by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness) will provide Niagara Region additional coaching in the adoption of proven practices and strategies to meet this goal, targeted for our local context. Work on this important campaign is already underway and regular updates on our progress will be provided to Council.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Providing emergency shelter for individuals in need aligns with Council's Strategic Priority related to healthy and vibrant communities, which includes supporting clients through the stages of the housing continuum towards more stable and permanent housing.

Other Pertinent Reports

COM 26-2019	Homelessness Services Report 2018
COM 33-2019	Provincial Policy and Funding Changes – Monitoring for Local Community Impact

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Appendices

Appendix A	Emergency Shelter System Capacity
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