

Community Services 1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way, Thorold, ON L2V 4T7 905-980-6000 Toll-free: 1-800-263-7215

MEMORANDUM

CL-C 9-2020

Subject: Community Services – COVID-19 measures

Date: March 18, 2020
To: Regional Council

From: Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

This memo serves to inform Council of the measures Community Services has taken to ensure continued delivery of essential services (further to our pandemic and business continuity plans), activities/services that have been cancelled in order to implement appropriate public health measures to protect our clients and community (and allow for the redeployment of staff), and some initial efforts to find alternative approaches to support the most vulnerable in Niagara.

Long Term Care

All of the Region's eight long-term care (LTC) homes (Deer Park Villa, Gilmore Lodge, Linhaven, Meadows of Dorchester, Northland Pointe, Rapelje Lodge, Upper Canada Lodge, Woodlands of Sunset) are delivering essential LTC care to residents and additionally working with the hospital to consider opportunities to temporarily increase LTC bed capacity in order to support hospital capacity in the weeks ahead. Staff are actively implementing all of the public health measures appropriate to long-term care further to the direction of the provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health, and the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care. This includes active screening of staff and delivery services, closing the homes to visitors (except for those residents approaching end of life), discontinuation of volunteer supports, increased cleaning and more. Please know that our staff are working hard, and are committed to continue providing safe and quality care to our residents. All Adult Day Programs have been cancelled, as well as Healthy, Safe, and Strong community exercise classes, the South Niagara Health and Wellness Program, the Respite Companion Program and Wellness Supportive Living Program. Staff from these services are being redeployed to support long-term care or conduct regular phone support to clients who were previously served through home visiting. Staff are also actively working with residents and families to find alternative ways, as appropriate, for families to connect with residents (e.g. telephone, FaceTime). Business continuity plans are developed and being followed in accordance with the changing local conditions.

Homelessness Services & Community Engagement

All of Niagara's funded homelessness shelters are operational. Staff are in regular communication with service providers to support, through guidance and financial support, the implementation of public health measures appropriate for this sector. Measures include appropriate screening of clients and staff, increased cleaning, adjustments to sleeping arrangements, continued encouragement of diversion efforts, and increased daytime options for those who have been using seasonal/Out of the Cold shelters. Particular attention in our planning has included shelter alternatives for individuals who are currently medically compromised (and should not be sleeping in congregate arrangements during this time) and for those individuals who may be identified in the future as having COVID-19 (and health and social supports to assist them). Additionally we are refining the role and directions for outreach staff as we anticipate increased movement by some to move to 'unsheltered' homelessness or 'sleeping rough' (this was also an experience in many communities during the H1N1 pandemic).

It should be noted that, while not a direct mandate for Community Services, it has been reported that food banks and other auxiliary community supports are seeing negative impacts of this emergency. Some food banks are reporting reduced supply at a time when those who are most vulnerable will be having greater difficulty coping. Additionally many agencies are seeing reductions in their volunteer complements due to self-isolation requirements after travel or the age of volunteers (many volunteers in Niagara are seniors). Depending on local resources, staff are actively exploring alternatives for certain essential programs.

Children's Services

Further to the direction of the Chief Medical Officer of Ontario, all licensed child care centres (both directly operated and those operated by not-for profit and for-profit providers) and EarlyON Centres are now closed. Children's Services continues to support providers as they struggle with the financial impacts of these closures, and are leveraging whatever flexibility is available in our provincial funding to support them. All client services associated with our fee subsidy program are being provided over the phone or online. Children's Services is already investigating the possibility of providing child care services for emergency/health service staff (confirming local need, hours, and ministry permissions).

Social Assistance - Ontario Works

Staff in Social Assistance - Ontario Works are working in all five offices, and supporting both current clients and accepting new applications. The offices are closed to walk in visitors but services are available by phone, and funds are being approved and provided as quickly as possible to respond to local need. Call volumes have increased for Ontario Works benefits and staff are being redeployed accordingly to meet this increased need. The Region has also acquired additional phone lines, to address both the increased call volumes in Public Health and Ontario Works. Plans are underway to support end of month cheque distribution for those not on direct deposit. (Further to requests from a number of municipalities, attached is specific information on how to access financial support through Ontario Works.)

Niagara Regional Housing

Niagara Regional Housing continues to provide essential housing supports to its tenants and access to applications for those seeking affordable housing. Emergency repairs, and "make ready units" for new move-ins continues, and cleaning has been increased in seniors and multi-residential buildings. Any trades providing urgent maintenance to buildings will be screened before granted entry. Residents are being directed whenever possible to drop applications/renewal and rental payments (not in the form of cash) in drop boxes. Staff are developing a list of residents who are considered to be at risk during times of isolation, and these will be provided regular phone contact. All group programs/activities are temporarily postponed, and the board has a meeting this Friday via teleconference.

Respectfully submitted and signed by:	
Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE Commissioner	

MEMORANDUM

Subject: Ontario Works Program

Date: March 18, 2020

From: Lori Watson, Director, Social Assistance - Ontario Works

Due to the evolving COVID-19 situation and in cooperation with provincial directives, Niagara Region is making changes to how we are interacting with residents and how services are being delivered to the community.

Ontario Works Program

Social Assistance - Ontario Works offices are closed to the public until further notice. All services will be provided to individuals by telephone.

As we continue to deal with a high volume of calls during this time, Ontario Works clients are asked to follow a number of steps.

New Applicants:

Online application for Social Assistance - Ontario Works: Online application

Or by telephone:

Intake Line / application - Intake Line/Application: 905-641-9230 1-866-627-1110 (West Niagara)

The intake process is two steps:

- First, you either complete the online application or call the intake line where you will have a telephone conversation. Basic information will be collected and can take up to 30 minutes.
- Second, a staff member will contact you within four business days to complete the application over the telephone.

Ongoing clients contacting the office:

Please be advised that all Social Assistance - Ontario Works offices are closed to the public until further notice. All service will be provided over the telephone.

Local offices:

St Catharines: 905-641-9960

Welland- Port Colborne: 905-734-7975 Niagara Falls – Fort Erie: 905-354-3561

When leaving a message:

Clients are asked to please leave their name, phone number and reason for the call. Every effort will be made to return your call as soon as possible.

Status of your assistance:

Information is available by calling the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) line at 1-800-808-2268; you will need to have your member ID ready.

Correspondence / Documents:

Mail: All correspondence/ documents can be forwarded by regular mail through Canada Post or dropped off in person and placed in the drop box located at each Social Assistance - Ontario Works office.

Further information can be found at:

Niagara Region website: www.niagararegion.ca

Questions and concerns from MP's, MPP's and Mayors please contact:
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