
Memorandum

CAO 10-2020 Appendix 2

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Community Services
Date: April 23, 2020
To: Regional Council
From: Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

This memo serves to update Council on the additional measures Community Services has taken to ensure the continued delivery of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the alternate approaches used to support those most vulnerable in Niagara.

Seniors Services

Long Term Care

Seniors Services continues to implement known best practices to respond to a pandemic to protect residents and implement all provincial directives. Recent directives include a temporary pause on transitioning hospital patients into LTC Homes and limiting staff to working at a single LTC Home. Both these measures are in place across all eight Regional homes. Seniors Services continues to source and secure adequate levels of personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, to ensure compliance with directives from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Long-Term Care, however, this remains a continuous effort. Beyond implementation of all public health and outbreak measures, staff continue to provide the best possible care to residents and are using virtual methods to contact family members to allow for visits with their loved ones and provide updates on care whenever possible. A communication was sent to the families of our LTC residents, acknowledging the recent media coverage around long-term care homes, and outlining the risk mitigation measures that are in place across our homes to support the safety of our residents and staff (Appendix 1).

Outreach Services

Beyond long-term care, Seniors Services provides a number of programs in the community, including outreach services. During this time, Seniors Services, in partnership with local community agencies, have enhanced the Niagara Gatekeepers program to help reduce isolation and ensure basic needs are addressed for vulnerable or at-risk seniors in the community. Services available include: weekly, friendly

telephone calls to check-in with seniors; providing access to groceries and medications; ensuring transportation is available for urgent medical appointments; and, supporting access to financial entitlements. Niagara Gatekeepers is available at (905) 684-0968 and is answered between 8:30am to 8:30pm, 365 days a year.

Homelessness Services & Community Engagement

Homelessness Services continues to engage with community partners in prevention and mitigation efforts related to COVID-19. In partnership with Niagara Region Public Health, Homelessness Services provided updated guidance, training and resources to the sector to ensure enhanced infection prevention and control measures. Support has also been provided to the emergency shelter system through screening tools, policies and procedures to protect both staff and clients. Funding through Homelessness Services has ensured shelter providers have access to cleaning and disinfecting supplies, personal protective equipment, and is available to address staffing pressures.

Through REACH (Regional Essential Access to Connected Health) Niagara, Dr. Karl Stobbe and his team of physicians enrolled in the Niagara family medicine residency program, have provided all emergency shelters with telemedicine (virtual services) to support effective screening for COVID-19 infection. REACH Niagara is also providing ongoing monitoring of care and symptoms of those residing at the isolation site (further explained below).

Physical distancing remains one of the best ways to prevent spreading COVID-19. To enable individuals experiencing homelessness to physically distance, Homelessness Services, in partnership with service providers and REACH Niagara, has taken a number of steps:

- Identified those most vulnerable to COVID-19, including the elderly and those with health conditions, and moved them into motel units.
- Secured additional motel units for those able to live independently in order to create capacity within the emergency shelter system.
- Established an isolation facility to respond to the number of people experiencing homelessness, presenting with respiratory symptoms and requiring COVID-19 testing. So far, 30 individuals have accessed this site and all testing results to date has been negative for COVID-19.
- Enhanced the Assertive Street Outreach program which serves unsheltered homeless in encampments or other public spaces, to increase safety, encourage access to shelter and housing services, provide advice on public health measures and offer hygiene kits, and help screen for symptoms (including providing access to the isolation shelter as appropriate).

Even during a pandemic, the best and only solution to homelessness is to provide people with access to permanent housing. Therefore, Homelessness Services continues to support providers in their efforts to connect clients to housing options with appropriate levels of support. Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, Homelessness Services also works with the Canadian Red Cross and other partners in continuing to respond to events (such as a recent fire in Welland), where individuals have been suddenly rendered homeless.

Children's Services

Children's Services has launched a registration process for those seeking to access emergency child care based on criteria established by the Ministry of Education (i.e. first responders, health care professionals) and recently extended registration site access to include police services staff. Capacity for this service remains limited as, to date, only Niagara Region's directly operated child care facilities have been able to respond to the call for such services. Staff are in dialogue with a private operator in St. Catharines who is determining if they can secure sufficient staff willing to work, in order to open.

Children's Services has opened four of the five directly operated child care centres, to operate as emergency child care centres, including:

- Branscombe Early Learning and Family Centre (Niagara Falls)
- Fort Erie Regional Child Care Centre
- Welland Regional Child Care Centre
- St. Catharines Regional Child Care Centre

The Port Colborne Child Care Centre is unable to open as it is located in a school and access is prohibited as per provincial legislation. There are 108 licensed child care spaces available across these four centres, and while the allowable licensed ages of children served across these sites varies, all have expanded their services to accept school-age children. In partnership with Public Health, Children's Services has developed and implemented heightened cleaning and disinfecting protocols, including regular on-site inspection visits to ensure compliance.

In addition to Regionally operated childcare centres, Niagara Region's licensed Home Child Care service and Wee Watch home child care are now operating to deliver emergency child care.

Social Assistance - Ontario Works

Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) continues to provide essential financial and life stabilization supports to its 10,432 Ontario Works clients, and process applications for Ontario Works. For those not currently in receipt of social assistance (Ontario Works or ODSP), the provincial government has expanded access to the *emergency assistance benefit*, which is intended for those who may be experiencing a crisis or emergency situation and have no access to other supports. Individuals and families who qualify for this benefit includes those who are waiting for benefits from the federal government e.g. Employment Insurance (EI) and Canada Emergency Benefit (CERB). For those in receipt of social assistance, the provincial government has increased access to *discretionary benefits* for those in crisis or who are facing an unexpected emergency as a result of COVID-19. Applications for Ontario Works, emergency assistance and discretionary benefits have significantly increased and continue to be processed within four business days.

The five SAEO offices continue to be closed to the public. For those accessing services, SAEO staff are available by phone, and funds are being approved and provided as quickly as possible to respond to local need.

Niagara Regional Housing also wished to share the following update with Council.

NRH continues to provide essential services (including filling vacancies with new tenants as units become available) in all business streams while taking necessary safety precautions. Applications are being processed, emergency repairs completed, and additional supports are being provided to tenants, members, landlords and housing providers. NRH continues to provide frequent communication with stakeholders, and directs both NRH tenants and housing providers to the Public Health website and telephone lines to obtain real time information on COVID-19.

In partnership with Public Health, NRH has ensured increased cleaning and disinfecting, and implemented a number of policies and protocols to align with COVID-19 prevention and mitigation efforts within owned housing stock. For example, both tenants and contractors are required to be screened prior to emergency work being performed in a unit. NRH has developed and implemented Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) in the event that a tenant either tests positive for COVID-19 or dies due to COVID-19. The SOP will be effective in its direction to staff to increase cleaning and reach out to other tenants in the building, and will be shared with housing providers.

Additional Support to Community-Based Services

Community Services is working closely with community partners to ensure that the food and essential needs of vulnerable residents are being met during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic, and implementation of extraordinary community measures to slow the spread of the virus, the need for food programs has increased dramatically. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 response, many people are unable to leave their homes and face financial hardship, and many of the community supports they regularly use have closed or altered their services in keeping with recommended public health measures.

Community Services is working with 211, United Way Niagara, and other community agencies, such as Meals on Wheels providers, to identify where the greatest needs are and how best to ensure low-income and vulnerable residents continue to have food access.

Respectfully submitted and signed by:

Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE
Commissioner

APPENDIX 1



Community Services | Seniors Services

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April 15, 2020

To All Niagara Region Long-Term Care Home Resident Families

A lot of information about Long-Term Care Homes has been shared in the media recently. Knowing you are apart from your loved ones right now, we thought it would be helpful to provide you with an update of risk mitigation measures we have put in place across our homes to support the safety of our residents and staff. Inside our homes the well-being of all your family and our staff continue to be our top priority.

We have implemented a number of measures across the homes in line with Ministry of Health, Public Health and Ontario Health directives including;

Staff Screening

- Our homes continue to be closed to visitors at this time and all staff are actively screened when they come in to the home and again when they leave the home at the end of their shift.
- Active screening includes taking each employee's temperature
- Staff who have a symptom are tested and go into self-isolation
- Staff who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19 are tested and go into self-isolation
- All staff are also self-monitoring throughout their shift, if they begin to feel unwell or develop a symptom they immediately leave and contact Public Health for testing and self-isolate

Containment/Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- All of our staff are only working at a single home at this time
- Each employee in the home wears a surgical mask at all times when they are at work

- When staff provide care for a resident in isolation they wear a mask (surgical or N95 depending on the type of care), a gown, gloves and a face shield
- We have sufficient supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in our homes to ensure that staff have the necessary products available for them at all times

Resident Screening

- All residents are screened twice daily for symptoms
- In addition to ongoing heightened surveillance of residents throughout all shifts
- If a resident has a symptom they are isolated and tested
- If a resident is transferred from hospital they are isolated for 14 days as a precautionary measure

Social Distancing

- Our dining areas and lounges have been reorganized to support social distancing
- Furniture such as sofas have been removed and replaced with chairs that are placed an appropriate distance apart
- Dining areas have been reconfigured to ensure social distancing
- Residents who are in isolation but prone to wandering have been assigned a one-to-one support to ensure that if they wander from their room they are maintaining physical distancing at all times

Cleaning

- Enhanced environmental cleaning continues with additional housekeeping shifts and with increased frequency of cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.

Communications

We understand that it is very difficult for residents to not have visitors at this time.

- We have implemented communication plans for residents so we can support residents to continue to be able to interact with families through means like phone calls, skype or facetime. Recreation and social work staff are focused on ensuring that residents have access to the supports they need through these challenging times.

Training/Staffing

We are fortunate to have a phenomenal team of staff working across our homes. All staff have had refresher training and updates on;

- respiratory outbreak management
- hand hygiene
- personal protective equipment
- all aspects of COVID-19 and related care and risk management implications

As you know, across our homes we normally benefit from the ongoing support of many families and volunteers. To help offset this loss of support we have added extra staffing hours to ensure that residents receive all the care and help that they require.

To date we have not had any residents who have contracted COVID-19 across our homes. If in future we do have a resident who tests positive in a home where your family member lives you will receive notification.

I would like to thank you very much for your continued understanding and collaboration as we work together to keep our residents and our staff safe and well. Thank you very much for your many messages of support and appreciation for staff. Your family are our family and we continue to work to keep everyone safe and well. It means so much to everyone to receive your feedback.

Warm Regards,

Henri Koning,
Director, Seniors Services