Subject: Homelessness Services Report 2019

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, June 16, 2020

Recommendations

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

Key Facts

*   This report provides information regarding Homelessness Services activities and metrics for 2019 and planned activities for 2020.
*   Niagara was successful in its application to join Built for Zero Canada, a movement dedicated to helping communities work toward an end to chronic and high-acuity homelessness.
*   In 2019, 35 spaces were added to the Housing First and Home for Good supportive housing programs, bringing the total capacity at the end of the year to 200 and 58, respectively.
*   Niagara implemented a shelter diversion pilot to support individuals presenting to shelter in finding other options to stabilize their housing situation.
*   Negotiated Requests for Proposal were issued in late 2019 to procure Emergency Shelter, Assertive Street Outreach, Prevention, Transitional Housing, and Housing with Supports (Housing First and Home for Good) services, including a Request for Pre-Qualification for the Niagara Emergency Energy Fund.

Financial Considerations

The activities highlighted in this report were provided within the 2019 approved operating budget. As per the 2019 approved budget, Homelessness Services is primarily funded by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) ($8,286,923 - 76.0% (which includes Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and Home for Good funding), and also by the federal Reaching Home program ($897,623 - 8.2%), as well as Regional levy ($1,713,561 – 15.7%).

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Analysis

Community Services operationalizes the Region's provincially mandated responsibilities as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) for the homeless-serving system in Niagara. Its key responsibility is service system planning and administration for the homeless-serving system, and it operates under rules established by the MMAH and by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). Niagara Region also receives federal funding under the Reaching Home program and is identified as the local Community Entity for this funding.

Homelessness services were delivered by 22 community agencies through purchase of service contracts with Niagara Region in 2019. The types of homelessness services align with the Council approved priorities of assertive outreach, supported transitional housing, Housing First and Home for Good supportive housing, emergency shelters, and homelessness prevention. In 2020, homelessness services will be delivered by 18 community agencies following the procurement of services through a Negotiated Request for Proposals (NRFP) process.

Service system management includes establishing and maintaining relationships with community agencies and others to set priorities and identify gaps. Administrative responsibilities include allocating resources to meet local needs including setting and implementing accountability structures to manage and deliver an outcome-focused service system.

Homelessness Services Metrics

Initiative	2017	2018	2019
Emergency Shelter			
Number of unique individuals accessing shelter	1949	2156	2141
Average length of stay (in days per admission)	24.3	25.0	20.9
Average nightly bed occupancy rate	107.6%	104.5%	107.3%
Prevention			
Number of unique households that received a Niagara Emergency Energy Fund (NEEF) issuance	950	826	802
Average value of NEEF issuances	$574	$681	$703
Number of unique households that received a Housing Stability Plan benefit	3306	3615	3675
Average value of Housing Stability Plan benefits issued (e.g., rent arrears, last month's rent deposit)	$705	$738	$782

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Initiative	2017	2018	2019
Housing with Related Supports			
Number of unique (new) individuals placed in Housing First	85	68	63
Number of unique (new) individuals placed in Home for Good	N/A	33	9

Homelessness Services Activities

The following are activities undertaken in 2019 to support continuous improvement within the homeless-serving system and drive outcomes related to the reduction of local homelessness.

- The Housing and Homelessness Action Plan was updated after completion of a five-year review and was subsequently approved by MMAH.
- The 'Homeless Individuals and Families Information System' (HIFIS) became the primary data collection tool for Homelessness Services. HIFIS is a web-based homeless management information system created by the federal government and available at no cost to Niagara Region (for the software). This system captures client information including demographics, housing histories, case management interactions and goal achievement. With a few exceptions, most client information in HIFIS is shared across providers within Niagara's homeless-serving system, facilitating better coordination of services between staff/providers at different community agencies, as well as with Regional staff.
- Niagara joined the Built for Zero Canada (BFZ-C) movement to end chronic homelessness. A Coordinated Access program analyst position was added to the Homelessness Services team and the BFZ-C Home Team was formed as the working group leading Niagara's participation in Built for Zero Canada and support the achievement of a By-Name List (BNL) and Coordinated Access, which are best practices that will assist Niagara to end chronic homelessness (also Reaching Home requirements).
- Niagara's BFZ-C team lead (Coordinated Access program analyst) and data lead (program evaluation and data advisor) worked with the information and analytics senior architect from the Region's IT department to develop a BNL report, as well as BFZ-C performance tracking reports, that draw directly from the data entered into HIFIS by the homeless-serving system.
- In late 2019, Coordinated Access principles were tested in selecting individuals for newly available Home for Good spaces. Clients referred to the program were

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prioritized utilizing specific criteria (e.g., Indigenous identity, youth) and were selected at a meeting of frontline stakeholders based on the prioritization process.

Niagara Region's Housing First supportive housing program, operating since 2014, continued to provide housing placement services, case management supports and rent supplements to support individuals experiencing chronic and/or episodic homelessness to achieve housing stability long-term. At their six-month milestone, 82% of clients were housed and active in the program, or had successfully exited Housing First. At 12 months, this rate was 79%. **These results are considered quite positive within the Housing First model.**

HF Program Status	Outcome		At 6 Months		At 12 Months	
Active	Still housed	Original placement	189	68%	129	52%
		Subsequent placement	25	9%	41	17%
	Waiting for subsequent placement		23	8%	13	5%
Discharged	Exited to homelessness		7	3%	8	3%
	Exited successfully		15	5%	26	10%
	Exited for other reasons		18	7%	31	13%
Total			277	100%	248	100%

- Through a partnership with Niagara Regional Housing (NRH), 17 units in a newly constructed NRH apartment building were added to the Housing First program, along with office space for an on-site Housing First case manager.
- Gateway Residential and Community Support Services' new Home for Good build in Port Colborne neared completion, with anticipated occupancy in early 2020. This will add eight purpose-built units to the Home for Good supportive housing program.
- Another 10 community-based Home for Good units were added in late 2019. In Home for Good, clients receive similar but enhanced case management supports, as in Housing First, with a reduced caseload ratio for support workers due to more complex needs, as well as the provision of mental health services, addiction services, and occupational therapy, as needed.

In April 2019, The RAFT launched a youth shelter diversion program, in which a shelter diversion worker meets with individuals seeking emergency shelter at The RAFT. Through completion of a structured shelter diversion tool and process, based on the Region of Waterloo's model, other options are explored to stabilize the individual's housing situation. In the first six months of the program, over 40% of youth were successfully diverted to other housing options within 48 hours of presenting. Building upon this success, The RAFT and Southridge Shelter partnered in November 2019 so

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that The RAFT performs shelter diversion for all youth (age 16-24) at both emergency shelters and Southridge adopted the same model of structured shelter diversion in their emergency shelter for individuals age 25+. In 2019 and into 2020, the rate of successful diversion from The RAFT youth shelter remained over 40%. For youth first-time shelter users, the rate of successful diversion was over 50%. Successful diversion rates are significantly lower among adults, although the practice is still effective, and especially worthwhile among adult first-time shelter users. Shelter diversion was included in the 2020 NRFP for Prevention and awarded to ensure this best practice will be implemented across the shelter system.

Successful Diversion	The RAFT All Youth	The RAFT New to Shelter System
No	58.6%	42.6%
Yes	41.4%	57.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

- Consultations regarding outreach services and possible enhancement to this category of programming occurred resulting in a final report and the creation of Assertive Street Outreach Guidelines. This work formed the basis for procurement of redesigned Assertive Street Outreach services through a NRFP process.
- The NRFPs issued in late 2019 reflected the large scale homeless-serving system transformation work that has been taking place to support Niagara's movement towards the System 2.0 model and the System 3.0 model. These models and associated activities were outlined in Niagara Region's Homelessness Services System Review (e.g. sharing the Housing-Focused Shelter Framework, including program and system Key Performance Indicators in procurement documents, welcoming a lead-agency model for proponents in the procurement process, etc.).

In December 2019, Niagara Region hosted a presentation by Iain De Jong to nearly 300 attendees, including elected officials, service providers and other stakeholders. Mr. De Jong, an internationally recognized expert on ending homelessness, challenged commonly held assumptions, debunked myths about homelessness, and provided insight about effective evidence-based approaches to ending homelessness in the Canadian context.

Other Planned Enhancements

Enhancements planned or started for 2020 (excluding efforts associated with COVID-19):

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- Award new Homelessness Services contracts
  - Consolidation of Housing First and Home for Good provision
  - Assertive Street Outreach team approach
- Expand Shelter Diversion services
- Formalize a training calendar for homeless-serving system staff
- Implement human trafficking safe house pilot
- Achieve a Quality By-Name List (aligned with federal Reaching Home requirements)
  - Implement common assessment tool across homeless-serving system
- Continue work on Coordinated Access system (aligned with federal Reaching Home requirements)
- Measure progress toward program and system KPIs
- Begin Housing-Focused Shelter and Bridge Housing pilots
- Implement mapping software for Assertive Street Outreach team

Alternatives Reviewed

Not Applicable

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

Homelessness services support the Healthy and Vibrant Community Council Priority.

Other Pertinent Reports

- COM 08-2020 HHAP Update 2019
- COM 01-2020 CHPI Investment Plan 2020-21
- COM 40-2019 Five-Year Review of Niagara's 10-Year HHAP
- COM 26-2019 Homelessness Services Report 2018
- COM 23-2019 Niagara Region Application for Built for Zero Canada
- COM 10-2019 Homelessness Services System Review
- COM 01-2019 CHPI Investment Plan 2019-20
- COM 16-2018 Homelessness Point-in-Time Count Report
- COM 08-2018 Homelessness Services Report 2017

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Submitted by:
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