
MEMORANDUM

COM C 20-2020

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in Community Services
Date: July 14, 2020
To: Public Health & Social Services Committee
From: Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner, Community Services

This memo provides updates on the measures Community Services has taken to ensure continued delivery of essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the alternate approaches used to support those most vulnerable in Niagara. Detailed information pertaining to business continuity measures is available in COM C 19-2020 (Appendix 1).

Seniors Services – Long-Term Care

Outdoor visits have been introduced at long-term care (LTC) homes, according to requirements outlined in provincial directives. The Regional homes have:

- Developed an outdoor visiting policy
- Provided communication and educational materials to families
- Developed an appropriate outdoor space for family visits
- Established outdoor screening stations
- Implemented a process to schedule visits

Families participating in scheduled outdoor visits must:

- Complete a COVID-19 test with a negative test results within 14 days of the visit
- Undergo active screening, including a temperature check, upon arrival, wear a mask and must maintain physical distancing

For families not participating in outdoor visits, communication plans are maintained to ensure continued interaction with residents through their preferred method of communication (e.g. phone calls, Skype, FaceTime or window visits).

While LTC homes are maintaining virtual services, outside services are gradually being re-introduced. For service providers who must come into the homes, they are part of bi-weekly COVID-19 testing, are actively screened, and adhere to PPE requirements. Residents seen by these providers also wear masks, eye protection, and other forms of PPE as required and appropriate.

Occupancy thresholds have been waived and homes have been asked to maintain some vacant private rooms to support effective isolation of residents moving into shared rooms, for a 14 day period. These rooms are being used as isolation transition rooms.

LTC homes have developed plans to support the eventual reintroduction of indoor visits and non-essential services (e.g. foot care services). Staff continue to review and revise business continuity plans to ensure preparedness for a potential second wave of COVID-19.

Seniors Services – Outreach Services

Deer Park Suites Assisted Living has implemented an outdoor visiting program and policy closely aligned to the measures implemented in LTC homes. Residents continue to be offered supported communication through FaceTime, Skype and phone calls.

Adult Day Programs and the Respite Companion Program are transitioning to blended models of service. Adult Day Programs will incorporate both small group direct interaction (with appropriate PPE and physical distancing measures) and virtual programming support. The Respite Companion Program will implement a gradual return to in-home visits (modified in duration) and include health and safety controls to support safe social interaction. The program will continue with regular telephone visits while working on the introduction of virtual visits.

In the Supporting Independent Living Program, Seniors Community Programs and Mental Health continue to conduct home visits based on the priority needs of a client, and with the use of appropriate PPE and physical distancing measures. Additional wellness checks are also being carried out over the phone.

The Client Intervention and Assistance Program is mobilizing in-home visits. Home visits will be carried out based on the priority needs of a client, and with the use of appropriate PPE and physical distancing measures. Initial assessment work is completed through the phone with a follow up home visit for persons without phone access and/or if service planning requires home visits for better client outcomes.

Staff are looking to mobilize a virtual Healthy, Safe and Strong Exercise Programs pilot in late July.

The Wellness Supportive Living Program, offered in Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) buildings, is waiting for plans around reopening common spaces. Services will be provided once a week in four NRH buildings, on a scheduled basis.

The South Niagara Wellness Program is waiting for provincial guidance regarding the provision of congregate programs within schools settings (e.g. Niagara College campus location - group ambulatory rehab program).

The application for federal funding has been approved in the amount of \$23,000 and will be issued by United Way through the COVID-19 Emergency Community Support Fund. The funding will go towards the 'Calls for Connection' initiative, which is looking to re-purpose existing Respite Companions who are trained to provide one-to-one interaction with people who are living with dementia. Part of their training includes being able to identify potential risks and to notify the support team when they occur. During the COVID-19 recovery period, Respite Companions will provide both a well-being screener and social connection calls on a weekly basis (or more frequently if deemed necessary) for all consenting clients / care partners who have been identified as being 'at risk'.

Homelessness Services & Community Engagement

Homelessness Services continues to operate the full emergency shelter system, overflow hotel rooms, and the self-isolation facility. This facility provides homeless individuals a space in which to self-isolate and receive testing. As of June 29, 2020, 119 individuals have been referred with testing results, to date, negative.

Street outreach services remain enhanced to support those living in encampments or 'living rough', and address the volume of requests from local area municipalities. Outreach workers are ensuring that individuals who are living rough are provided with access to services based on COVID-19 screening and assessments of health. Additional primary care supports are being developed in partnership with Reach Niagara to provide services to those living rough.

The Government of Ontario announced all licensed child care centres were permitted to open on June 12, 2020. With the opening of child care centres, the province also indicated that emergency child care would wind down effective June 26, 2020.

Children's Services provided emergency child care for essential workers through four of the five regionally operated child care centres, as directed by the provincial government. Niagara's two licensed home child care agencies also operated, and one external child care service provider, Church of St. Thomas Day Care, opened as an emergency child care centre. This emergency child care has now wound down and all child care programs will be returning to "regular" business operations, with new safety requirements, as of June 17, 2020.

The fifth regional child care centre (Port Colborne) opened as of June 29, 2020. Thirty-five external service providers have indicated they will be opening at various times in the month of July. Below is the status of licensed child care in Niagara as of July 2, 2020.

- Number of licenced child care space pre-pandemic – 12,000*
(including centres and home based). **This also includes before and after school care spaces which run according to the school year.*
- Number of licenced child care spaces at July 2 – 409
(including centres and home based). This represents 3% of our pre-pandemic operating capacity.
- Number of licensed sites operating pre-pandemic - approx. 250
(including centres and home based).
- Number of licensed sites operating at July 2 – approx 40
(including centres and home based). This represents 16% of our pre-pandemic operating capacity.¹

The above numbers represent Niagara Region licensed sites only. Our understanding is there are a number of unlicensed operations that are also experiencing re-opening

¹ Based on the Ministry of Education's "Operational Guidance During Covid-19 Outbreak Child Care Re-Opening" document issued in June, child care placement is prioritized for the following: returning children served through emergency child care to their original placement and continuity of service for these families; care for families where parent must return to work and that work outside of the home; families with special circumstances that would benefit from children returning to care, such as children with special needs; and other local circumstances.

issues, however these are not governed through Niagara Region nor the provincial government.

Licensed child care operations are gradually starting up, due to the additional safety and operational requirements set out by the Ministry of Education. Service providers required time to return to their centres, bring staff on site, develop new health and safety policies and processes, and conduct training related to new operational practices. They were also required to reorganize their centres and determine how they would meet specific mandated requirements regarding cohorting children and staff in groups of 10 individuals per room, with increased staffing for screening and cleaning.

Due to additional staffing requirements, some service providers have merged some of their centres to accommodate staffing pressures over the summer. Children's Services will review potential system-wide operational pressures for the month of September, based on cohorting changes directed by the Ministry of Education.

Social Assistance & Employment Opportunities (Ontario Works)

SAEO has developed a comprehensive contingency plan to respond to a potential increase in demand for social assistance, once the federal CERB has ended. SAEO is also developing a recovery plan that will ensure essential supports are delivered through the phases of recovery and reopening of the province.

Niagara Regional Housing (NRH)

NRH continues to develop recovery plans to support the re-introduction of all services. In June, staff called more than 1,000 tenants offering to connect them with supports and services. A number of these tenants (160) had been identified as particularly vulnerable and were offered additional supports.

Fewer tenants have moved out of NRH units since the beginning of the pandemic, but this started to increase in June as Phase Two opened up access to more services. Applications for housing have increased, although the number of applications are not back to pre-pandemic levels. The decrease in applications during April and May might be due to fewer support services available to assist with applications.

Adrienne Jugley, MSW, RSW, CHE
Commissioner

Appendix 1 COM C 19-2020 COVID-19 Response and Business Continuity in
Community Services