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**REPORT TITLE: Update on COVID-19 Funding for the Homeless and Other Vulnerable Populations**

**FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services**

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the 2021 Housing Support gross revenues and expenditures be increased by \$17,873,700 as a result of additional provincial Social Services Relief Funds (Phase 4) in the amount of \$12,027,300 and the additional Ontario Isolation Centres Initiative Funding in the amount of \$5,846,400;**

**And further, that Capital Project 21-5035 be increased in the amount of \$5,542,397 as a result of Social Services Relief Funds (Phase 4) funding, with no net impact;**

**And further, that the 2021 Income Support gross revenue and expenditures be increased by \$154,000 as a result of additional provincial funding under the Temporary COVID-19 Isolation Emergency Support Fund.**

## **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- To date, the Region of Peel has received \$93,257,118 from the federal and provincial governments to support and protect the homeless and other vulnerable populations throughout the pandemic.
- The emergency COVID-19 funding has enabled the Region of Peel, with our community partners, to adapt and in some instances, enhance services and supports.
- In addition to minimizing COVID-19 outbreaks in Peel's shelter system, based on data modelling, it is estimated that Peel's response prevented 653 COVID-19 cases, 436 hospitalizations, 176 ICU admissions and 112 deaths in individuals experiencing homelessness in Peel.
- COVID-19 emergency funds are temporary. As such, staff has begun to plan for the transition out of emergency response and the safe resumption of increased occupancy in Regional shelters.
- Staff continues to advocate to the provincial government, including Ontario Health, for permanent funding, so the enhanced access to health supports for the homeless and precariously housed provided throughout the pandemic, can be sustained.

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## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Background**

As previously reported to Council, the Region of Peel has received emergency COVID-19 funding for the homeless and other vulnerable populations from the federal and provincial governments. This temporary funding has been provided by the federal government

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through the Reaching Home program, and the provincial government through the Social Services Relief Fund, the Ontario Isolation Centre Initiative, one-time mental health and addictions support and the Isolation Emergency Support Fund.

Since the last update to Regional Council on May 27, 2021, the Province has allocated the Region of Peel an additional \$5,846,400 under the Ontario Isolation Centres Initiative, \$12,027,300 under the Social Services Relief Fund Phase 4 and an additional \$154,000 for the Isolation Emergency Support Fund.

This report provides Regional Council with an update on how COVID-19 emergency funds have been spent up to August 31, 2021 and how recent allocations have been committed. The report also provides Council with the plan to transition out of the COVID-19 emergency response for the homeless.

### 2. COVID-19 Emergency Funding Spent and Allocated to Date

To date, the Region of Peel has received \$93,257,118 from the federal and provincial governments to support and protect the homeless and other vulnerable populations throughout the pandemic.

The table below outlines the amount of funding allocated.

<b>COVID-19 Emergency Funds for the Homeless and Vulnerable Allocated to Peel</b>	
<b>Federal Government</b>	
Reaching Home COVID-19 Emergency Funding	\$13,125,392
<b>Provincial Government</b>	
Social Services Relief Fund	\$44,135,588
Isolation Emergency Support Fund	\$554,000
One-time Mental Health and Addictions Support	\$313,338
Ontario Isolation Centre Initiative	\$35,128,800
<b>Total Provincial Funding</b>	<b>\$80,131,726</b>
<b>Total Provincial &amp; Federal Funding</b>	<b>\$93,257,118</b>

The Region of Peel's COVID-19 response for the homeless includes:

- Extra cleaning and enhanced IPAC protocols at Regional shelters
- 50 per cent occupancy at Regional shelters with increased use of overflow hotels
- Isolation centres for the homeless and those who cannot safely self-isolate at home
- Additional out-of-the-cold programs
- An additional drop-in centre in downtown Brampton
- Provision of portable washrooms and showers for homeless residents
- Funding to community agencies

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The Isolation Emergency Support Fund has been used to support individuals who do not qualify for other social assistance programs and other federal or provincial income assistance programs.

The emergency COVID-19 funding provided by the federal and provincial governments has enabled the Region of Peel, with our community partners, to adapt and in some instances, enhance services and supports provided to the homeless and other vulnerable populations.

During the peak periods of the pandemic, Housing Services, together with our community partners, operated four isolation and recovery centres, providing a total of 363 rooms for the homeless and community members who were not able to safely isolate at home. Three of these sites were funded through the Ontario Isolation Centre Initiative. The fourth site is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Between March 2020 and August 28, 2021, 2,888 individuals participated in Peel's COVID-19 Voluntary Isolation Housing program.

The extra cleaning and infection control protocols at Regional shelters and transitional housing sites, coupled with reducing shelter occupancy to 50 per cent through the use of additional overflow hotels helped to keep the rates of COVID-19 outbreaks amongst the homeless to a minimum in Peel. Only 60 cases of COVID-19 between March 2020 to April 2021 were associated with shelter outbreaks, representing 1.9 per cent of shelter residents during peak periods of the pandemic. Additional data modelling from February 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021 revealed that the Region of Peel's COVID-19 response prevented an estimated 653 COVID-19 cases, 436 hospitalizations, 176 ICU admissions and 112 deaths in individuals experiencing homelessness in Peel.

Moreover, from February 2021 to April 2021, 3600 visits were made to the Nelson Street Drop-In Centre in downtown Brampton. Almost half (44 per cent) of these visits were made by individuals who are housed. Fifty-two per cent of total visits were by individuals between the ages of 30-55 years old, of which, 83 per cent identified as male. Seven per cent of total drop-in visits, or 259 clients, met with the nurse practitioner. In addition, harm reduction supplies were highly used. From February to April 2021, 3245 harm reduction kits and supplies, 56 Naloxone kits, 29 sharps containers and 342 counselling sessions were distributed. The enhanced health supports provided through this drop-in centre decreased the need for clients to attend hospitals during the pandemic and improved access to primary care for vulnerable individuals.

Over the same time period, Peel Regional Police reported an overall decrease in calls for the downtown Brampton area relating to unwanted loitering and other issues involving individuals presumed to be experiencing homelessness. In February, March and April 2021, calls decreased 12 per cent, 19 per cent and 26 per cent respectively, when compared to the same months in 2020.

Full details about all funding allocations and funding spent to August 31, 2021 can be found in Appendices I, II and III.

### **3. Planning to Transition Out of COVID-19 Emergency Response**

The COVID-19 emergency funding is temporary. In Peel, federal COVID-19 funding for the homeless ended in June 2021. Ontario Isolation Centre Initiative Funding ended in September 2021 and Social Services Relief Fund Phase 4 funding ends in March 2022. As a result, staff has begun to plan for the transition out of the emergency response for the

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homeless. Further details about each component of the COVID-19 emergency response for the homeless are below.

### **a) Shelter Overflow Sites and Increased Shelter Cleaning**

Demobilization of the additional overflow shelter hotel sites will occur using a phased approach, beginning in November 2021. The second phase of demobilization will occur at the end of February 2022; subject to the status of the pandemic. The intention is to bring more clients back into the shelter system but not to pre-pandemic levels. Staff is working with legal services and Public Health on infection prevention controls and vaccination policies in order to safely increase shelter occupancy levels. Increased cleaning will remain in place, as will all physical distancing measures. Staff will be reviewing levels of service in the shelter system, including overflow protocols and will bring recommendations back to Council by June 2022.

### **b) Isolation Centres**

Since June 2021, as community vaccination rates increased, Peel's Isolation Centres have started to close. The Ontario Isolation Centre Initiative funding ended as of September 30, 2021. Two isolation centres remain open, one in Brampton and one in Mississauga, using other sources of provincial and federal COVID funding, and provide 140 rooms. Current weekly occupancy rates are averaging 10 per cent to 15 per cent. Given that the need for isolation centres is declining and because federal Public Health Agency of Canada and provincial Social Services Relief Fund Phase 4 funding ends in March 2022, the two remaining isolation centres will close by the end of March 2022. Peel's isolation centres have not only been effective in decreasing community spread of the virus but have also improved housing outcomes for many vulnerable and homeless clients. Between February 2021 and September 2021, 524 individuals who upon intake were without stable housing were referred to Housing Support Workers. Of that total, 302 or 58 per cent of individuals were discharged from isolation into stable housing.

### **c) Downtown Brampton Nelson Street Drop-In Centre**

Staff plan to close the Nelson Street Drop-In Centre at the end of December 2021. Given the steady usage and positive impact of the services provided, access to a nurse practitioner will be extended to the end of June 2022, using a combination of temporary pandemic and Regional funding. Beginning in January 2022, supports from a nurse practitioner will be delivered at Regional shelters and other community locations in both Brampton and Mississauga. This service will augment the existing health supports provided by the mobile Outreach team, which continues to serve street homeless clients across the Region. Harm reduction supplies will be delivered throughout Peel, through Peel Public Health's existing Needle Exchange Program.

### **d) Out of the Cold Programs**

The Out of the Cold programs in Brampton at St. Leonard's Place and at WestEdge Community Church in Mississauga will continue to operate, using non-emergency federal Reaching Home funding.

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### **RISK CONSIDERATIONS**

Emergency COVID-19 funding for the homeless and other vulnerable groups from the federal and provincial governments is temporary. The extended Ontario Isolation Centre Initiative funding ended as of September 30, 2021 and the province has advised that Phase 4 of the Social Services Relief Fund will be the final allocation of COVID focused funding and must be spent by March 31, 2022.

Staff has started to review overflow management protocols and plan for the safe increase in occupancy levels at our emergency shelters, as permanent funding is not available to sustain service levels achieved throughout the pandemic. Staff will return to Council by June 2022 with recommendations and funding required to safely operate Regional shelters and overflow facilities post-pandemic.

In addition, the lack of adequate, stable provincial health funding for the homeless means that the improved access to health supports made possible through the pandemic will end in 2022, if permanent funding cannot be secured. Staff continue to work with Ontario Health to find solutions and additional funding for the homeless and precariously housed in Peel.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Human Services has received an additional \$5,846,400 from the Province for the Ontario Isolation Centre Initiative, \$12,027,300 through the Social Services Relief Fund Phase 4 and \$154,000 under the Temporary COVID-19 Isolation Emergency Supports Fund.

The 2021 Housing Support gross expenditures and revenues will be increased by \$17,873,700 due to this additional provincial funding and the 2021 Income Support gross expenditures and revenue will be increased by \$154,000. Similar to other COVID-19 related funding received in Human Services, the funding announcements require equal amounts of expenditure and revenue and have no net impact on the 2021 Budget. Any remaining unused Social Services Relief Fund Phase 4 funding will be carried forward into 2022 to be used by March 31, 2022, with no net impact.

As a result of additional Social Services Relief Fund Phase 4 funding staff is recommending that Capital Project 21-5035 be increased in the amount of \$5,542,397, with no net impact. This project was approved in the in-camera report titled "Rapid Housing Initiative" by Regional Council on September 9, 2021, Resolution #2021-940.

### **CONCLUSION**

This report provides Regional Council with an update on how the emergency COVID-19 funds received from the federal and provincial governments were spent up to August 31, 2021 and summarizes planned uses for the recent allocations received. The report also provides Regional Council with an overview of the plan to transition out of the COVID-19 emergency response for the homeless.

The COVID-19 emergency funds from the federal and provincial governments have greatly assisted vulnerable Peel residents throughout the pandemic. However, because these funds

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are temporary, staff has begun to plan for the transition out of emergency COVID response and continues to advocate to the provincial government, including Ontario Health for permanent funding, so the enhanced access to health supports for the homeless and precariously housed throughout the pandemic, can be sustained.

### **APPENDICES**

Appendix I – 2020-2021 Reaching Home COVID-19 Funding Summary

Appendix II - Phase 1-4 Social Services Relief Fund Funding Summary

Appendix III - COVID-19 Community Fund Funded Agencies April – August 2021

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*Authored By: Laura Tribble, Advisor, Housing Services*