
REPORT TITLE: **COVID-19 Funding for the Most Vulnerable – Responding to the Immediate Needs of the Community**

FROM: Janice Sheehy, Commissioner of Human Services

RECOMMENDATION

That the Commissioner of Human Services be authorized to execute the Reaching Home COVID-19 Response Plan transfer payment agreement “Canada’s Economic COVID-19 Response Plan – Support for People Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness” for receipt of the additional COVID-19 Reaching Home Funding, on business terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Human Services and on legal terms satisfactory to the Regional Solicitor;

And further, that the Commissioner of Human Services be delegated authority to approve the use of the funding for service provision in accordance with the federal special COVID-19 directives and in response to local needs;

And further, that the Director responsible for the service provision funding be delegated authority to execute agreements and other related documents to deliver COVID-19 Reaching Home programming and financial supports, on business terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Human Services and on legal terms satisfactory to the Regional Solicitor;

And further, that the Commissioner of Human Services be authorized to execute the Social Services Relief Fund – Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative agreement for receipt of the COVID-19 emergency funding from the Province of Ontario, on business terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Human Services and on legal terms satisfactory to the Regional Solicitor;

And further, that the Commissioner of Human Services be delegated authority to approve the use of the funding for service provision in accordance with the special COVID-19 program details and in response to local needs;

And further, that the Director responsible for the service provision funding be delegated authority to execute agreements and other related documents to deliver the COVID-19 Social Services Relief Fund programming and financial supports, on business terms satisfactory to the Commissioner of Human Services and on legal terms satisfactory to the Regional Solicitor;

And further, that the 2020 Housing Support gross expenditures and revenues be increased by \$11,835,021 as a result of additional federal and provincial funding.

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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The federal and provincial governments have announced emergency funding to ensure communities can continue to protect and care for the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - A total of \$11,835,021 has been allocated to Peel which includes \$5,846,621 through the federal government's Reaching Home Program and \$5,988,400 from the provincial government's Social Services Relief Fund.
 - Reaching Home funding focuses on programs that serve the homeless or those at imminent risk of homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - The provincial Social Services Relief Fund is designed to help communities respond to the increased and changing demands for services to the vulnerable, including but not limited to the homelessness.
 - Staff have worked with the community to implement a range of initiatives that respond to the immediate needs of the most vulnerable; the associated cost estimates are preliminary.
 - When combined with the forecasted costs of measures designed to address the medium and longer-term impacts of COVID-19, it is expected that expenditures will substantially exceed the \$11,835,021 funding allocation.
 - Through this report, staff is seeking Council authority to enter into agreements with the federal and provincial governments to administer the funds as per the program directives, and in response to local needs.
 - Staff will keep Council apprised of emerging needs and bring forward updated estimates and information through the monthly Chief Financial Officer's updates on the management of the financial impacts of COVID-19 and through the triannual reporting process.
 - Staff will report back to Council with details of the recommended supports required to assist Community Agencies and Housing Providers in dealing with the medium and longer-term impacts of COVID-19.
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DISCUSSION

1. Background

Peel Region has a history of working with community partners to provide collective action to support those in need. To address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Region convened a network of community-based organizations and stakeholders to take part in a Community Response Table. The mandate of the Table is to identify and respond to emerging needs, and to support coordination, information sharing and collaboration. As part of these efforts, the COVID-19 Emergency Fund was established.

On March 26, 2020, in a report titled "Supporting the Region of Peel's Community Agencies During the COVID-19 Pandemic", Regional Council approved \$1 million in regional funding through the Community Investment Program, to establish a COVID-19 Emergency Fund. This fund was designed to assist community agencies with their immediate needs related to the impact of the pandemic. Given the demand on the fund, Regional Council approved a motion (Resolution 2020-295) on April 9, 2020 that gave staff the authority to continue to process applications beyond the \$1 million allocation and not solely on a one-time basis.

To mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on homeless individuals, a number of initiatives have also been implemented including extra cleaning and personal protective equipment for shelter and transitional housing clients and staff, additional temporary housing to ensure

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adequate physical distancing is in place in the shelters, and an isolation and recovery program.

A total of \$11,835,021 has been allocated to Peel as Service Manager for housing and homelessness, which includes \$5,846,621 through the Reaching Home Program and \$5,988,400 from the Social Services Relief Fund, administered through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative. This emergency funding is being flowed to ensure communities can continue to protect and care for the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Funding Directives

a) Reaching Home

Reaching Home is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness across Canada. The special directives for the emergency fund indicate that the funding is to continue to focus on programs that serve the homeless or those at imminent risk of homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. The directives allow for more flexibility and additional eligible expenses. These include but are not limited to housing services that keep people housed to limit the spread of the virus and shelter diversion programs. For additional details of eligible expenses under this funding stream please see Appendix I.

Funding from the emergency Reaching Home allocation may be used for eligible expenses that began as of April 1, 2020. The Region of Peel is entitled to up to 15 per cent of the total funding allocation for administration costs.

b) Social Services Relief Fund

The provincial Social Services Relief Fund was developed to help communities respond to the increased and changing demands for services to the vulnerable, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The fund is designed to be very flexible to enable Service Managers to meet local needs. Examples of eligible expenses include funding to deliver expanded critical services for vulnerable populations and enhancing rent banks that are already in operation. For additional details of eligible expenses under this funding stream please see Appendix I.

3. Assessing Immediate Community Need

In Peel, there are at least 18 different at risk, vulnerable groups, with seniors, at-risk youth, low income families and children, new immigrants, the homeless, the physically/intellectually disabled and victims of domestic violence, being the most prevalent.

The following measures are designed to deal with immediate needs in the community:

a) Measures to meet basic needs

Measures have been implemented and funding is required to ensure the most vulnerable have access to the necessities of life including food, essential supplies and support services. This category also includes interventions in place to protect against the

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adverse effects of isolation as well as activities that promote physical distancing.

Examples include:

- Extra signage, cleaning protocols, screening, personal protective equipment and other supplies at shelters and in transitional housing facilities, within the Peel Housing Corporation, other community housing providers and community programs.
- Temporary housing, such as hotels for the homeless to ensure adequate physical distancing in the shelters.
- Outreach, equipment and supplies to prevent those who are isolating from acquiring the virus while also providing access to services to support their mental and physical health.
- Food banks, grocery vouchers, drop-in centres for the street homeless and others.

b) Measures to isolate and care for the vulnerable who are tested and/or ill

Measures have been implemented and funding is required to prevent the spread of the virus and to adequately care for those who are most vulnerable who have tested positive for the virus, are awaiting test results, or are ill. Examples include:

- Isolation programs and sites for those who are awaiting test results, or suspect they are ill.
- Medical care to the homeless who have tested positive for the virus and are recovering.
- Additional resources for individuals who are in the isolation and recovery programs including food, medication, and front-line care staff.
- Increased cleaning and personal protective equipment for isolation and recovery programs.
- Transportation costs to transfer individuals to the isolation and recovery programs.
- Mental health supports for members of those households in isolation and/or experiencing illness and/or suspected to be ill.

The situation continues to evolve and change rapidly, and the expenditures incurred are dependent on a number of factors that are difficult to quantify at this time, such as, but not limited to, the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of individuals affected, the longer-term impact to the operational sustainability of community agencies and housing providers, and the availability of future funding from the federal and provincial governments.

All expenditures are being closely tracked and monitored should additional funding streams become available.

4. Assessing Medium and Longer-term Needs

According to a recent survey of the Ontario Non-Profit Network, non-profits and charities are facing a triple threat as a result of COVID-19: an abrupt loss of revenue from the cancellation of fundraising events and a steep drop-off in donations; the closure of offices and cancellation of programs due to pandemic restrictions; and unprecedented human resource challenges in terms of both paid staff and volunteers.

In the Greater Toronto Area almost one in five non-profits have closed their doors or are making plans to do so. Fifty per cent of non-profits have identified that they have less than the bare minimum of three months of reserve funds.

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In Peel, a recent survey of over 200 community agencies revealed that 83 per cent of all non-profits have had program closures, and decreased staffing levels while facing increased demand for services for residents. 54 per cent of Peel non-profits surveyed stated they have adapted service delivery to COVID-19 state of emergency conditions, even though they are experiencing immediate financial impacts through loss of revenue, donations, and canceled fundraising events.

In order to mitigate medium to longer-term impacts, funding is required to assist in investments in technology and other equipment to enable community agencies to continue to adapt their business models to remain open during the pandemic, and to offset revenue losses.

Moreover, community housing providers, including the Peel Housing Corporation, are facing the risk of losses in revenues as tenants struggle to pay rent. At this point, preliminary estimates using available data suggest that the community housing sector could require funding of up to \$10,000,000 to offset shortfalls.

Additional factors for consideration and analysis are attached as Appendix II.

Staff will report back to Council with details of the recommended supports required and the work that will be undertaken to assist Community Agencies and Housing Providers in dealing with the medium and longer-term impacts of COVID-19.

RISK CONSIDERATIONS

While the additional emergency funding from both the federal and provincial governments is welcomed, the work underway to support the immediate basic needs, and the analysis of medium and long-term impacts suggests that current levels of funding are insufficient.

Staff is currently making recommendations to be considered as part of an overall advocacy strategy for Housing, which will be tabled at Council by June 2020.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Region of Peel has been allocated additional Reaching Home funds in two allocations, \$918,019 and \$4,928,602 related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the Region has also been allocated \$5,988,400 from the provincial Social Services Relief Fund.

The 2020 Housing Support gross expenditures and revenues will be increased by \$11,835,021 as a result of this additional federal and provincial funding.

As of April 20th, the Region has received 62 applications under the Community Investment Program COVID-19 Emergency Fund, totalling requests for \$3,511,769. As applications are processed; staff review the content with the respective community agency. To stay within the eligibility criteria of the fund, only items related to urgent needs in each request are approved. To date, 58 applications have been granted, totalling \$1,055,863.

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Initial requests were flowed through Regional funds, which Council had approved as an increased expenditure of \$1,000,000 from the Tax Rate Stabilization reserve. Staff will maximize the use of federal and provincial funding first and use the Regional funding for applications that do not meet the directives from other levels of government.

The costs to September 1, 2020 to operationalize the isolation programs, recovery program, increased use of hotels to ensure physical distancing in shelters, enhanced outreach services, and additional cleaning, PPE and other supplies is estimated at approximately \$6,000,000.

When medium-term to longer-term mitigation measures are considered, it is anticipated that current funding will be insufficient to meet community need. Staff will keep Council apprised of emerging needs and will bring forward updated estimates and information every month through the Chief Financial Officer's updates on the management of the financial impacts of COVID-19 and through the regular triannual reporting process.

CONCLUSION

The Region of Peel, together with our local municipal and community partners, is committed to protecting the homeless and other vulnerable populations from the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19.

The federal and provincial governments have announced emergency COVID-19 funding to assist communities to support the most vulnerable. A total of \$11,835,021 has been allocated to Peel.

Through this report, staff is seeking the required authorities and approvals to enter into the funding agreements with the federal and provincial governments, to administer the funding as per program directives and in response to local needs.

APPENDICES

Appendix I – Details of Eligible Expenses under the Funding Allocations

Appendix II - Medium and Longer-Term Measures to Address the Impacts of COVID-19

For further information regarding this report, please contact Aileen Baird, Director, Housing Services, Ext. 1898, aileen.baird@peelregion.ca.

Authored By: Laura Tribble, Advisor, Housing Services

Reviewed and/or approved in workflow by:

Department Commissioner, Division Director and Financial Support Unit.

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Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nancy Polsinelli". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "N" and a distinct dot over the "i" in "Polsinelli".

N. Polsinelli, Interim Chief Administrative Officer