
REPORT TITLE: **Health Services – Resourcing the Ongoing COVID-19 Response in 2023**

FROM: Nancy Polsinelli, Commissioner of Health Services

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. That to continue the ongoing required response to COVID-19 from Health Services, the delegation of authority to the Commissioner of Health Services to extend the 357 existing temporary contracts with an estimated annual cost of \$31.8 million be approved; and**
- 2. That the Regional Chair write a letter, on behalf of Regional Council, to the Minister of Health advocating the Province of Ontario continue mitigation funding (COVID-19 vaccination, and COVID-19 extraordinary costs) beyond 2022; and**
- 3. That a copy of the letter be sent to Peel-area Members of Provincial Parliament, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.**

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Health Services is expected to have ongoing needs for the COVID-19 response well into 2023 and beyond, and ongoing resources will be required.
- To continue the required response to COVID-19, the extension of 357 temporary contracts at an annual cost of \$31.8 million is required in Health Services. These resources will be needed to sustain the response until such time the risk faced by the community is mitigated. The costs are expected to be covered through Provincial funding. Staff will look at funding options including the use of reserves if provincial funding does not extend beyond 2022.
- Health Services will continue to monitor the areas of greatest community need, scale back where appropriate, and assess annually until needs are met.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

Together with numerous internal and external partners, Region of Peel (Region) has overseen the longest emergency response in Peel's history. Over two years, the Region has managed 180,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases, delivered over 3.4 million vaccines to residents through the Mass Vaccination Program and managed over 1,700 confirmed outbreaks in institutional and community- based settings. In addition, the Region's municipal Long Term Care (LTC) homes have worked to protect residents and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, while continuing to provide high-quality safe, compassionate, person-centered care.

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Health Services is expected to have ongoing needs for the COVID-19 response well into 2023 and beyond, and ongoing resources will be required. Public Health continues to work towards remobilizing mandated programs and services while balancing the demands of COVID-19, including vaccination of eligible residents. Efforts to protect the Region's LTC residents, staff and visitors from COVID-19 still needs to continue. This report outlines recommendations for the extension of temporary contracts needed for sustaining this response to the end of 2023.

2. Staffing Requirements for 2023

Over the last two and a half years, Council has approved through a number of reports the staffing resources required for the Region to successfully respond to the pandemic including resources for the Mass Vaccination Program, Public Health and Long Term Care.

a. Mass Vaccination Program

The October 28, 2021, report of the Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Corporate Services, titled "Pandemic Response – Financial Update" estimated that 389 of the current staffing resources would be required into 2022 to continue the mass vaccination program, with an estimated cost between \$19 million to \$38.5 million, depending on the duration of the pandemic. Considerations included the emergence of new COVID variants, which is continuing; the vaccination of newly eligible populations, such as young children; the need for updating protection through vaccine boosters, especially for those at highest risk: the need to provide vaccinations delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among school-aged children; and preparedness for disease surges, particularly in the Fall. These considerations were again emphasized in 2022 by the Ministry of Health who asked that health units continue with 'last mile' COVID activities, non-COVID and Fall planning, and maintain surge capacity.

Further, the Ministry of Health has excluded the staffing resources that would be required by Peel Public Health to fully deliver their core mandated services. Currently staff estimate that 288 temporary contracts are required to continue the mass vaccination program.

b. Public Health COVID-19 Response

In addition, the November 12, 2020, report from the Commissioner of Health, titled "Peel Public Health COVID-19 Response" identified that additional 32 temporary full-time staff were required. For the continued COVID response as required by the Province, resources are needed to support administrative functions of case management and to manage COVID investigations and outbreaks in high-risk settings (long term care and retirement homes, congregate living settings) along with supporting COVID outbreaks in our hospitals.

c. Long Term Care

Further, the October 10, 2020, report from the Commissioner of Health, titled, "COVID-19 Planning and Recovery in Long Term Care" identified that 37 temporary full-time staff would be needed in Long Term Care (LTC) to support the COVID response. Given the continued challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Region's LTC homes require these dedicated staffing resources to ensure the health and safety of residents and staff. These positions will continue to support Ministry of Long-Term Care mandated infection prevention and control measures including the screening of all staff and visitors, outbreak management, and resident engagement.

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Overall, to meet the ongoing needs for the COVID-19 response into 2023 and beyond if required, an extension of the 357 existing temporary contracts in Health Services (see Table 1 below) will be required to ensure the sustainability of the response and mitigate risk faced by our community. Current staffing full-time equivalents has reduced from its 2022 peak in January/February of over 1,000 and the current ask represents a further reduction of approximately 60 per cent from current levels.

Table 1

Program	Existing Temporary Contracts Requiring Extension	Estimated Cost
Mass Vaccination Program	288	\$26.3M
COVID-19 Response	32	\$3.2M
Long Term Care COVID-19 Requirements	37	\$2.3M
Total	357	\$31.8M

Staff continue to monitor and assess staffing needs on a regular basis and will identify future opportunities to streamline resources as community needs shift.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The annual cost of the staffing resources to meet the ongoing needs of the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to be \$31.8 million. The costs are expected to be funded by the province. However, in the event the funding does not materialize, staff would look at options including the use of reserves to fund the costs.

RISK IMPLICATIONS

Should funding not be confirmed as available for pandemic related programming, the ability to provide COVID-related support to the community (including case and outbreak management and vaccinations) would be extremely limited, starting early in the Fall of 2022. Continuation of these human resources will ensure that vaccines are available to all, especially for those most at risk, and that non-COVID-19 programs and services can be remobilized.

CONCLUSION

As the pandemic persists in our community, Health Services continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery, while planning for a more stable future state for the immunization program, including COVID. Funding certainty is necessary to ensure sufficient programs and services can be delivered on behalf of the residents throughout Peel.

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