



MEMO/NOTE DE SERVICE

To / Destinataire Mayor and Members of Council

From / Expéditeur Donna Gray
General Manager, Community and
Social Services Department

Subject / Objet COVID-19 Response: Addressing Community Needs -
UPDATE Date: 31 March 2020

Community and Social Services staff continue to assess community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to refine the City's response in collaboration with community partners. The purpose of this memo is to provide an update on work done over the last week to address the needs of residents across Ottawa.

Human Needs Task Force

The Human Needs Task Force was struck to coordinate the emergency response to the pandemic and to ensure we are responsive to the emerging needs of the community.

The Human Needs Task Force includes partners from all sectors, including United Way Eastern Ontario, Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres of Ottawa, Ottawa Community Housing, Ottawa Food Bank, The Good Companions, Canadian Red Cross, the Salvation Army, Ottawa Inner City Health, Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition and Canadian Mental Health Association as well as representatives from City departments, including Ottawa Public Health.

The Task Force is focused on addressing the most immediate needs of food security and outreach to isolated seniors and vulnerable residents.

Food Security

Several community partners – including the Ottawa Food Bank, Meals on Wheels, [Montfort Renaissance](#) and the Champlain Community Support Network of more than 20 local non-profit agencies – are working to deliver food hampers, hot meals and groceries to seniors and other at-risk residents across Ottawa, including in rural areas. By working with community partners to reach out to rural communities, we are ensuring all residents have access to food. Anyone who needs food can contact any of these agencies through 2-1-1 or directly as identified previously in the [Human Needs Task Force fact sheet](#).

The City is assessing the food needs of the community and the sustainability of the food security system in anticipation of additional funding and food hampers from the provincial government and from Feed Ontario in the coming month.

Outreach to Isolated and Vulnerable Residents

The City is working closely with the Community Health and Resource Centre Coalition, Ottawa Public Health and the Red Cross to plan for door-to-door wellness checks, starting shortly in West Carleton. In the meantime, the [Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre](#), the [Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre](#) and the [Nepean Osgoode Community Resource Centre](#) continue to reach out to rural residents to ensure to meet their needs for mental health supports, food and other basic needs.

Seniors and at-risk residents are receiving wellness-check phone calls. That includes the 1,451 residents on Ottawa Community Housing's (OCH) emergency contact list, 80 per cent of whom are seniors. In addition, OCH's on-site partners are calling residents to check on them. For instance, Options Bytown are calling 80 tenants per day across their sites, with Salus and Aging in Place doing the same.

Over the longer term, the Task Force is identifying solutions to support residents facing the greatest barriers – those with no phone, no computer, no internet, and limited peer supports and rural geographic and connectivity barriers.

The City is working with the Champlain Community Support Network to join their new regional COVID-19 response site/portal as a one-stop information portal for isolated seniors, people with disabilities and others who are struggling through this crisis. The site will be available in both English and French and will support access to:

- Grocery and pharmacy delivery
- Transportation to essential medical appointments
- Telephone safety checks
- Meals on Wheels

The site will have direct links to important Ottawa Public Health and City of Ottawa information. Further information including links to this site will be forwarded to Council when it is operational next week.

The City of Ottawa, United Way and Community Foundation of Ottawa are aligning funding envelopes to coordinate funding to non-profit organizations, where it is needed most. The City will work closely with the United Way to support allocation of the recently announced federal funding to assist seniors through this crisis.

The City of Ottawa, United Way and Community Foundation of Ottawa are jointly funding Volunteer Ottawa as a one-stop shop for volunteer recruitment, training and placement. This new arrangement with Volunteer Ottawa allows a focused approach to addressing the priority need for volunteers in key agencies and across the community.

Urgent Transportation

The Champlain Community Support Network agencies are providing urgent transportation to medical appointments and grocery and food pick up for those with financial constraints, transportation difficulties or health and mobility issues.

Housing and Homelessness

The 1,200 Individuals within our shelter system and living unsheltered are a priority for the City's emergency response to COVID-19 and are critical to the containment of local transmission among the most vulnerable. Housing Services, Ottawa Inner City Health, local hospitals, shelter providers, housing support services and Ottawa Public Health are working collectively to ensure suspected COVID-19 cases within the shelter system are quickly assessed, isolated and supported.

As previously communicated to Council, the City opened the Routhier Community Centre as an Isolation Centre on Monday, March 23 to provide space for homeless, single men and women who need to self-isolate. The Centre provides on-site services by Ottawa Inner City Health, with support from Ottawa Public health. The number of individuals using the site fluctuates daily. The centre has the capacity to support 40 individuals. The City is monitoring the situation while planning for additional self isolation capacity requirements.

The federal government recognizes the critical needs of the local homelessness sector in containing the spread of COVID-19, and the capacity constraints in the sector to respond to these needs. The federal government announced \$1.65 million in new funding through the Reaching Home program to help Ottawa's homelessness sector cover pandemic-related expenses. The City has worked with agencies in the housing and homelessness sector to identify and prioritize their most critical needs. The City has allocated the \$1.65 million to 50 agencies, to cover extraordinary expenses related to COVID-19 over the next six to eight weeks, including funding for additional staffing, cleaning supplies, food, transportation and IT equipment. Housing and homelessness agencies have been notified of their allocation and should receive their funding by Friday, April 3. The City acknowledges the considerable efforts of the shelter and homelessness service sector for their efforts in supporting some of the City's most at-risk residents during this difficult period.

Although there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our family shelter or off-site services (hotels and motels), staff have worked to identify places where families can isolate, should the need arise. As communicated to Council, the City has secured 29 units with uOttawa that will be operational in the coming week as isolation space for families. In the interim, the City has secured two alternate spaces for this purpose, which are available immediately. A third alternate space will be available in two weeks.

There are youth in the community living in emergency shelters, transitional housing and other residential settings, where the ability to self-isolate is limited. The Youth Services Bureau is working with the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario to set-up isolation space for youth between the ages of 16 and 18.

The shelter system in Ottawa is currently at capacity, with overflow beds being used in our singles shelters. To promote physical distancing, the City is working with shelter providers to identify space suitable to reduce the overcrowding in the shelter system and to move those most at risk, including older shelter residents, to another location.

To promote physical distancing in the City's family shelter system, the City is identifying new hotel spaces with kitchen and laundry facilities for families, with 53 additional hotel

rooms secured to date. Housing Services continues to look for additional hotel options through regular outreach and discussion with the hotel industry.

In addition to these measures, the City continues to support families in the family-shelter system to find permanent housing by providing housing allowances.

On Wednesday, March 18, the federal government announced additional funding of \$157.5 million under the Reaching Home program to support people experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 outbreak. The City has been notified that our 2020-2021 funding allocation will be \$4.8 million under Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan to Support People Experiencing and At Risk of Homelessness. This funding complements the \$1.65 million received through Reaching Home for 2019-2020. Housing Services will work with the housing and homelessness service sector to allocate this funding to address the ongoing and emerging needs of the sector in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Housing Services is waiting for confirmation from the province on an increased, one-time allocation under the Community Homelessness Prevention Program (CHPI) to support households at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, in addition to broader needs in the community, as a result of COVID-19.

Community Funding Allocation

The local non-profit social infrastructure, over the last couple of weeks, has experienced unprecedented changes in service need and service capacity as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Many of the City's funded agencies have had to quickly implement new technologies and human services within physical distancing constraints and have transitioned into execution of their emergency management plans and practices. Throughout these first two weeks, the Community-funded agencies, United-Way-funded agencies and Community-Foundation-funded agencies have responded to the needs of this community.

The City acknowledges the significant role these agencies play in both our emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic and recognizes that a strong community service social infrastructure will be key in the journey to full business resumption and recovery. Given this, the City has implemented measures to sustain the agencies receiving community funding in our community. The City has advised the community funding agencies that we will continue to provide funds for the balance of the year.

With drastic reductions in both donations and volunteers, community partners in the non-profit social services sector will have reduced capacity to serve the City's residents experiencing the greatest needs. This will, in turn, put increased pressure on limited City resources. The City's continuation of community funding and the associated cost of living increase will be essential for the sector's sustainability and the wellbeing of all residents.

The City maintains an annual envelope of unallocated funds to address extraordinary, unexpected contingencies that may arise. The 2020 budget is \$299,000 and will be allocated to support non-profit agencies to respond to critical needs during the COVID-19 situation, address unforeseen emergencies and maintain essential operations where

possible. Funded agencies may apply for this emergency funding by contacting their Community Funding consultant.

Due to COVID-19 challenges faced by service providers and the community at large, Community Funding has put the One-Time Non-Renewable Community Project Fund Allocation Process on hold. Decisions will be made about Project Funding when the crisis resolves or when more information is available about emerging needs and the impact of the crisis on the community sector.

As a result of the impact of the COVID-19 situation on both City and community resources, Community Funding is postponing the new Community Funding Framework implementation until January 2022. No changes to existing funding with community agencies will occur in 2021. We will present a revised timeline to Council in the coming months.

Financial Supports to individuals and Families

All levels of government have taken direct and immediate action to support low-income households directly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. A significant number of income and wage support programs have been introduced by both the federal and provincial governments since Tuesday, March 17 to support those that have faced either a reduced or a total loss of employment earnings. The Provincial Ontario Works changes have been implemented immediately through our local Employment and Social Service offices. Most federal programs will be up and running by mid-April. All individuals requiring financial assistance should be directed to 3-1-1, and to push 4 for social assistance.

Provincial Government COVID-19 changes:

- The Province has announced additional Social Services relief funding, which has three components:
 - a) Enhanced emergency financial assistance funding for households who are not in receipt of Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), to assist with food, rent, utilities and other basic needs
 - b) Expanded OW and ODSP discretionary benefits, with increased funding flexibility for existing OW and ODSP clients to address extraordinary expenditures as a result of COVID-19
 - c) Expanded funding for Service Managers to support the delivery of social services to vulnerable populations under the provincial Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (details are anticipated this week)

Federal Government:

- An expedited Employment Insurance (EI) program with an online application process and reduced benefit wait times
- A one-time increase to the May 2020 Child Care Benefit payment of \$300 per child
- A one-time GST credit payment in May 2020 of up to \$400 for a single and \$600 for families
- New Federal Government Emergency Measures Benefit Program to provide household income support funding of up to \$2,000 per month (up to 16 weeks), starting in mid-April

- New Federal Wage Support Program to provide employers a wage subsidy of up to 75 per cent of employee wages during the period of COVID-19 restricted activity, retroactive to Sunday, March 15

Additional information and links to these programs are available at canada.ca.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Rent Geared to Income (RGI) households and social housing providers

Housing Services is working closely with social housing providers to understand and mitigate the financial impacts of COVID-19 on households in receipt of rent geared to income (RGI) assistance.

Households will be impacted differently depending on their source of income:

- Households in receipt of Ontario Works or ODSP, and seniors on fixed/government pensions (69 per cent of RGI households) will not be impacted as their rent is calculated using a legislated amount.
- Rent for households with employment as their primary source of income (31 per cent of RGI households) might be impacted over time. These households may have reduced or a complete loss of employment income as a result of closures of non-essential services and social distancing protocols. Mitigation strategies to assist households with lost employment income and to ensure no tenants will lose their housing are outlined below.

Housing Services have advised social housing providers of the following:

- No RGI-related evictions are permitted during the COVID-19 crisis
- No loss of RGI subsidy is permitted during the COVID crisis and all RGI households will continue to receive RGI subsidy based on March 2020 RGI rent payable, with retroactive calculations to occur at a future date
- Household submission of RGI documentation is suspended until further notice, to ensure social distancing and the health and safety of households and staff
- New RGI eligibility and RGI assistance Notice of Decisions are suspended until further notice to ensure proper due process, including the internal review (appeal) process that is available for households when decisions are made
- RGI rent calculations are suspended until further notice
- Applications for Special Provincial Priority (victims of domestic violence) continue to be processed by the Centralized Wait List

Housing providers have been asked not to re-calculate RGI assistance at this time, to follow the advice of both the Province and Ottawa Public Health to keep people out of the workplace, to support the physical distancing of the public, and to reduce additional administrative burdens for both Housing Providers or tenants who would need to secure and process paperwork. It will take significant human resources to re-calculate RGI assistance at this time, and to ramp up the Internal Review processes for the City, should people challenge any rent re-calculations.

This means that there may be tenants who, due to a loss or reduction in income, may have trouble paying their April and May rents. Tenants must apply for all income support programs that are available to them during this time.

These federal and provincial programs, available to tenants should they have financial impacts due to job loss or wage reductions, include Employment Insurance and the new Canada Emergency Response Benefit.

As well, information on provincial funding that is available for Emergency Assistance (non-OW and ODSP clients) to deal with shelter arrears and expanded discretionary benefits (for OW and ODSP clients) for arrears, has been provided to social housing providers.

These expanded benefits are expected to significantly mitigate the financial hardship of many individuals and enable them to pay their rent.

Allowing time for RGI households to access and obtain federal and provincial income support benefits could significantly reduce the increased municipal monthly RGI subsidy costs, in a time of increased financial pressures for the City caused by decreasing revenues. It would be beneficial to wait until May to start the formal household process to complete rent calculations for a June implementation.

Housing Services is working very closely with housing providers to monitor the situation and has asked them to track households that may be experiencing rental instability due to impacts to employment from COVID-19. In addition, a COVID-19 cost-tracking sheet has been issued to housing providers to accurately track and assess all extraordinary costs incurred as a result of the pandemic. Currently, most housing providers are in a positive financial position, with both operating surpluses and capital repair reserves. Housing Services staff will closely monitor housing provider COVID-19 costs and cash flow.

We will continue to proactively message to housing providers through our Service Manager teleconferences and E-Bulletins to ensure everyone can provide feedback and stay abreast of our decisions in this rapidly changing environment and work together to the benefit of residents in need.

As the Human Needs Task Force continues to adapt and change its approach, and as City staff and community partners address the emerging needs of Ottawa's most at-risk communities, we will provide regular updates to all members of Council. You can expect to receive regular updates via memo as well as through a series of Fact Sheets and FAQ's – including the attached one on Financial Assistance and addressing residents needs.

As always, 2-1-1 is available for information on the full range of community, social, government and health services and programs available in Ottawa, including how to access those services.

We will work closely with our service areas to ensure COVID-19 constituent inquiries are appropriately triaged and responded to in a timely fashion with consistent messaging.

Sincerely,

Donna Gray
General Manager
Community and Social Services

cc. Steve Kanellakos, City Manager
Senior Leadership Team
Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health, Ottawa Public Health
CSSD Department Leadership Team