



Office of the Commissioner
Community and Health Services Department

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

Date: November 12, 2020

Re: Social Services Relief Fund Phase Two

This memorandum provides an update on the Social Services Relief Fund (SSRF) including an overview of projects funded under Phase One, and information on Phase Two funding and projects to be implemented.

To prevent outbreaks and mitigate ongoing risks for vulnerable people in the Region during COVID-19, a strategy was created

York Region established a strategy in [April 2020](#) aimed at preventing and stopping the spread of COVID-19 and preventing housing loss while proactively ensuring supports and services were available to those experiencing homelessness through the pandemic. These were largely funded through SSRF Phase One funding, and most will continue with SSRF Phase Two funding:

Emergency housing/shelter supports for people who are homeless

1. Extended the two seasonal shelters that would normally have closed at the end of March until May 2020
2. Opened a temporary Self-Isolation Shelter to provide a place for individuals positive for COVID-19 or those waiting for test results to safely self-isolate
3. Transformed Kingbridge Conference Centre and Hotel into a temporary Transitional Shelter, to provide short-term support for vulnerable residents to self-isolate for 14 days to help them safely move into temporary or permanent housing

COVID-19 safety measures and testing

1. Created guidance documents for service providers to protect clients and staff and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Emergency Housing and Housing with Supports
2. Conducted proactive surveillance early detection testing at all Emergency Housing and Housing with Supports facilities (including Violence Against Women shelters) to seek out potential positive COVID-19 cases especially those who may be asymptomatic
3. Assisted Emergency Housing Providers and Housing with Supports providers with funding to enable physical distancing as well as support for Housing with Supports providers to reduce social isolation and promote healthy living and allow people to take loved one's home during this pandemic if this option was available and appropriate (which is allowed for in existing Housing with Supports Guidelines)

Preventing housing loss

1. Increased focus on rapidly rehousing people temporarily or permanently and providing continued wraparound supports and outreach services to keep them stable
2. Prevented housing loss by topping up the Housing Stability Program and Homelessness Prevention Programs to help people remain in their homes and avoid the spread of COVID-19

Funding through the provincial Social Services Relief Fund is intended to help municipalities and social service providers expand and continue to provide a wide range of services and supports for vulnerable populations

In March 2020, the Ontario government announced the first phase of the Social Services Relief Fund. York Region, as the Service Manager for housing and homelessness under the Housing Services Act, 2011, was allocated \$4,981,700, through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative.

In Phase One, the Region implemented a variety of supports and services as part of the strategy and was able to prevent major outbreaks from occurring in the Region's homelessness system. This initial funding allocation was spent by November 2020.

Social Service Managers were given planning allocations of Social Services Relief Fund Phase Two funding and were required to submit a business case to access the allocations

In August 2020, the Province announced additional funding through Phase Two of the Social Services Relief Fund. Municipalities were given initial planning allocations (\$8,419,414 for York Region) and required to submit a business case to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing outlining how the following provincial objectives could be met using the funds:

1. Mitigate ongoing risk for vulnerable people, especially in congregate care settings
2. Encourage longer-term housing-based solutions to homelessness post-COVID-19
3. Enhance rent assistance provided to households in rent arrears due to COVID-19

The business case detailed how the Region intends to continue the approaches developed during Phase One while increasing the focus on rapid rehousing options and helping people to retain and maintain housing.

The Region submitted a business case based on an analysis of community needs and consultation conducted with partners

In developing its business case, the Region engaged with numerous community partners including; Violence Against Women Shelters, Emergency Housing operators, Housing with Supports operators and the Ministry of Health, Social Services, Housing, Paramedic and Seniors Services and other divisions participated in the development and will support implementation.

In collaboration with community partners, through research on community needs, and identification of gaps in the homelessness system, short and medium-term projects were identified to mitigate ongoing risks and needs for vulnerable people, particularly in congregate care settings (such as seasonal shelters, Emergency Housing and Housing with Supports).

Partnerships allowed the Region to better identify and quickly respond in a collaborative way during Phase One and supported the development of the Phase Two business case. Collaborative community partnerships will ensure a coordinated system of services is responsive to both short and long term needs and will avoid duplication of efforts.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has confirmed \$8,419,414 in Social Services Relief Fund Phase 2 funding

Despite having just four weeks to develop a detailed business case, it was submitted for the deadline of September 11, 2020. On October 26, 2020, the Region was informed its business case was approved in its entirety and the Region will receive its total planning allocation of \$8,419,414. Approximately \$6.8 million will be allocated for operating, and \$1.6 million allocated for capital projects, with the remainder available to cover costs for administering the program. The operating funding must be spent by March 31, 2021 and capital projects must be completed and all capital funding must be spent by December 31, 2021.

Critical programs initiated in the spring to address COVID-19 will continue and additional longer-term housing-based solutions will be implemented

A large portion of the Phase Two funding has been allocated to continue necessary projects that started during the first phase of the Social Services Relief Fund, such as the Self-Isolation Shelter and the Transitional Shelter. As of September 30, 365 unique residents have been

supported at the Transitional Shelter and 33 unique residents have been supported at the Self-Isolation Shelter.

The Region will allocate approximately \$1.1 million of the operational budget of Social Services Relief Fund Phase Two funding towards assisting renter households to avoid housing loss due to rent arrears through the [Homelessness Prevention Program](#), [Housing Stability Program](#) or through a new short-term Temporary Rent Benefit Program.

In addition, funding will be used to encourage longer-term housing-based solutions and will assist to address gaps in services and supports, for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, identified during the pandemic including mental health, addictions, family reunification, finding employment, and re-training.

Social Services Relief Fund Phase Two funding will also be used to acquire new facilities and to retrofit and upgrade existing facilities

Phase Two also permits capital costs as eligible expenses, such as acquisitions, retrofitting and upgrading of emergency shelters, supportive housing, transitional housing, and related facilities. Plans include purchasing and installing modular homes (permanent housing units), converting congregate suites or current living areas into self-contained living units, and renovating and repurposing an existing vacant home into permanent affordable housing. These projects aim to add capacity to the current supportive housing available in the Region for individuals experiencing homelessness, help increase occupancy rates, mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and support facilities in the event of future pandemic waves.

A list of potential projects is provided in Attachment 1.

At this time there has not been any indication from the Province about additional funding past March 31, 2021, for operating funding and December 31, 2021, for capital funding, and beyond the confirmed allocation.

Regular updates will continue to be provided to Council, including a year-end report on the Social Services COVID-19 response planned for December 2020.

Katherine Chislett
Commissioner of Community and Health Services

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Attachments (1)