



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	Social Services
PREPARED BY:	Valerie Colasanti, General Manager
REVIEWED BY:	Ronald G. Van Horne, Chief Administrative Officer
MEETING DATE:	May 20, 2020
INFORMATION ITEM:	Social Services Relief Fund

BACKGROUND

The Social Services Relief Fund (the “Fund”) is a new \$200 million investment by the Ontario government in fiscal 2020-21 to help protect the health and safety of the province’s most vulnerable people through assistance to individuals and to frontline agencies. This includes people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, low-income households, social assistance recipients, people without jobs, households who depend on housing supports to maintain stable housing, people whose financial situation is precarious due to the COVID-19 crisis, people who live in community and supportive housing, and people who depend on social services to meet their basic needs.

The Fund was announced on March 23, 2020 and is a shared initiative between the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS).

The Fund includes two streams:

- 1) \$148 million in block funding provided to Service Managers to support municipalities and organizations that administer social services in their response to the COVID-19 crisis; and
- 2) \$52 million to individuals for those in financial crisis with no access to other supports, and those currently on social assistance requiring additional resources.

DISCUSSION

The \$52 million will be distributed directly to individuals/families in need through Ontario Works offices. There are two areas of assistance: emergency assistance which provides financial assistance to residents who are in crisis and unable to meet their basic living

expenses; and discretionary benefits for those already in receipt of Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program experiencing COVID-19 related hardships.

The \$148 million investment administered by MMAH in fiscal 2020-21 will be provided through the existing Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). Service Agreements and funding will flow through the existing program guidelines and reporting structures.

The County of Lambton as the Service System Manager for Homelessness Prevention received \$2,816,000 in funding from the Social Services Relief Fund. The funding is to be delivered under four broad service categories. These service categories include:

- **Emergency Shelter Solutions:** for people who are experiencing homelessness or in-crisis;
- **Housing with Related Supports:** may include long-term housing and transitional housing with supports;
- **Services and Supports:** services such as street outreach, case management, and transportation; and
- **Homelessness Prevention:** including rent and utility banks, emergency financial assistance and/or education programs to help people stay in their homes.

Emergency Shelter Solutions - Expenditures under this category include the cost to establish and operate an emergency overflow/isolation shelter to provide self-isolation space for up to 14 days, including wrap-around services for longer term needs. This includes costs for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), staffing, security, hotel rooms, meals, laundry and technology. Funds have been provided to all homeless shelter providers to augment their services as well during COVID-19.

Additional expenditures include funds to assist providers of homelessness services to operate their services as safely as possible.

Housing with Related Supports – Expenditures under this category include transitional housing costs for those who are experiencing homelessness and are able to live independently with some additional supports. Several apartment units were acquired by staff allowing individuals to move out of the homeless shelter into transitional housing. It is anticipated that these individuals will move into their own homes as the COVID-19 crisis ends and they no longer rely on the shelter. Other costs include hotel rooms, transitional housing costs, meals, laundry, support staff, technology and other individual supports as required.

Funds were also provided to the domiciliary hostels operating within Lambton County for additional COVID-19 related expenditures. These are licensed homes where daily meals and housing are provided to people who require supervision of their daily living activities. Residents are generally frail, elderly or have a mental health diagnosis. These are permanent homes for those who stay there. Lambton County has two homes. The

County's role is to provide fee assistance to eligible residents and provide oversight of the program.

Other expenditures in this category include planning for recovery and the development of a short-term rent supplement program to assist homeless individuals secure permanent housing, while providing the support services necessary to ensure they remain housed. Many of the support services will be delivered through purchase of service agreements already in place with community partners under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI).

Services and Supports - Expenditures under this category include transportation costs to transport those experiencing homelessness to various shelters safely and transportation for vulnerable individuals including seniors to medical appointments. Measures that offer supports to individuals include the delivery of meals to those living within Lambton County Social Housing who may need to self-isolate and are unable to go out as well as seniors that are struggling to manage meals on their own.

Cleaning services were increased at both the Lambton County owned Social Housing buildings and the Non-Profit Community Housing buildings to assist in stopping the spread of COVID-19 and keeping tenants safe. It is anticipated this enhanced cleaning will continue until the end of the calendar year.

Expenditures include food security (including \$120,000 flowed directly to the food banks within Lambton County) and grocery cards to low-income families delivered through numerous programs including Lambton Circles. Funding was provided directly to the YMCA to provide care packages which included activities for children and fresh fruit to low-income families who generally bring their children to YMCA programs. Other initiatives include providing school supplies for home schooling to families with school aged children in receipt of Ontario Works. Care packages for youth who may be precariously housed are being provided through Rebound. Basic essentials and clothing packages are also available for Lambton Elderly Outreach to support their Hospital to Homes program for low-income seniors.

Measures to assist low-income individuals and families close the digital divide by providing access to the Internet and technology are also being implemented to ensure they have access to key resources, skills training, and the ability to seek employment.

Homelessness Prevention - Expenditures in this category include the provision of Homemaker Services to vulnerable tenants, including seniors living in the County Social Housing buildings that require this assistance to maintain their tenancy. A temporary rental assistance program to assist market rent tenants living within Non-Profit Community Housing buildings has been established as well.

Expenditures also include the delivery of a rent/utility bank managed by Ontario Works. The rent/utility bank will be required as the COVID-19 crisis ends and individuals and families have to pay their arrears not paid during this crisis. This is anticipated to be one of the largest expenditures within the fund.

The following chart provides the breakdown of the anticipated expenditures of the fund by March 31, 2021 by category.

Service Category	Forecasted Expenditure Estimate (to March 31, 2021)
Emergency Shelter Solutions: for people who are experiencing homelessness or in-crisis	\$1,016,100.00
Housing with Related Supports: may include long-term housing and transitional housing with supports	\$308,450.00
Services and Supports: services such as street outreach, case management, and transportation	\$453,400.00
Homelessness Prevention: including rent and utility banks, emergency financial assistance and/or education programs to help people stay in their homes	\$1,040,000.00
Total	\$2,817,950.00

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no financial impact to the County as the Social Services Relief Fund is 100% provincial funding.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultations have taken place with community agencies, Lambton County Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee and County staff from various departments including Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services, Ontario Works, and Housing Services.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Providing services through the Social Services Relief Fund is consistent with the County's Mission Statement to promote an enhanced quality of life through the provision of responsive and efficient services accomplished by working with municipal and community partners.

CONCLUSION

Social Services will continue to prioritize resources where they are needed most, leverage existing resources, partnerships and community assets, coordinate with stakeholders, and work to minimize longer-term impacts of the emergency.

Many of the expenditures outlined in the chart above are estimates based on the information regarding the COVID-19 crisis at this time. As the crisis evolves and needs are addressed, staff will report back to Council on the final fund expenditures.

The federal and provincial governments have implemented funding to support individuals and sectors (such as seniors and food banks), and staff anticipate these programs will evolve and new ones will be launched. Through the County of Lambton's website and in partnership with the Social Services Network, staff will continue to provide information to individuals about these supports and direction on how to access them.