




Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	July 10, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Equity in the Emergency Plan (HSC23024) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Connie Verhaeghe (905) 546-2424 Ext. 6038
SUBMITTED BY:	David Cunliffe Chief, Hamilton Fire Department Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

At a Special GIC on January 12, 2023, Council approved the following motion:

“That staff be directed to identify an approach to integrate equity into the Emergency Plans to ensure residents made vulnerable or disproportionately impacted by social determinants of health are included and report back to the General Issues Committee with any resource implications.”

INFORMATION

Emergency events can occur at any time, any place and could disproportionality leave citizens vulnerable. Circumstances that may create barriers to equity in emergency planning and response are not limited to age, physical, mental, emotional or cognitive status, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, citizenship or socioeconomic status. Generally, anyone who does not have the means to meet their needs during an emergency can become vulnerable. Hence, the reference to vulnerable populations in this report is any resident who have been identified as vulnerable or disproportionately impacted by social determinants of health and are further impacted by the emergency or residents who become vulnerable or disproportionately impacted by social determinants of health, as a result of the emergency.

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In response to this motion, the City's Emergency Management staff have taken the following actions:

1. Reviewed the City's Emergency Response Plan to ensure an integrated approach to equity was identified in the Plan. As a result of this review, the Incident Action Plan template and the Emergency Operations Centre Management Team Agenda were revised as attached in Appendix A. The changes to the Agenda will ensure that at every Emergency Operations Centre Management Team meeting, members of the Emergency Operations Centre Management Team will discuss the impact of the emergency on vulnerable populations. The changes to the Incident Action Plan template will ensure actions are documented to mitigate the impact of the emergency on vulnerable populations.
2. An environmental scan of other municipalities (Halton, Peel, Toronto, York and London) was completed to determine their approach to equity in their emergency plans. All municipalities surveyed identified that the inclusion of equity was a function of their Emergency Social Services program. These municipalities/regions have a dedicated Emergency Social Service program that addresses social service needs of those impacted by an emergency. Their focus is on the vulnerable populations and those who become impacted by the emergency. In Hamilton, the Emergency Social Services Branch is located in the Operations Section of the Incident Management System organizational chart. The Emergency Social Services Branch connects with Emergency Social Services Control Group who provide emergency social services to those impacted by the emergency. This includes vulnerable populations. As a result of this review, the Incident Management System organizational chart (Level 1 and Level 2) was updated to add an Emergency Social Services Branch / Vulnerable Sector Liaison. The Vulnerable Sector Liaison will be activated through the Emergency Social Services Branch or through the Emergency Social Services Control Group if activated (see Appendix "A").
3. Consulted with Public Health Services and the Director of the Emergency Social Services Control Group: Discussed the Social Determinants of Health with the Emergency Coordinator from Public Health Services. Public Health Services has done a vulnerable population assessment based on the City's previous Hazard Identification Risk Assessment. The outcome of this assessment is the development of a list of considerations (i.e. needs assessment and public messaging) to help inform emergency response actions by Public Health Services.

In consultation with the Director of the Emergency Social Services Control Group, the approach to emergency will include a focus on vulnerable populations. During the activation of the Emergency Social Services Control

Group a dedicated resource, the Vulnerable Sector Liaison will address the issue of vulnerable populations and those who become vulnerable due to the emergency.

4. Consulted with the Departmental Leadership Team from Healthy and Safe Communities. The discussion focused on the provisions of services to vulnerable populations including those made vulnerable by the Social Determinants of Health including our Indigenous populations and those impacted by Climate Change. It was noted that a very thorough review was completed by the Vaccine Readiness Network post-COVID during their recovery phase/debrief. Their report titled “Equitable Vaccine Delivery in Hamilton: Lessons Learned from the Vaccine Readiness Network” focuses on the successes, challenges and lessons learned through the delivery of vaccine services to the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report informs and strengthens the ongoing and future relationships between community and health systems partners. Lessons learned in this document will serve as a guide to strengthen emergency response strategies for vulnerable populations including those made vulnerable by the Social Determinants of Health. Other documents such as the policy papers from “Just Recovery Hamilton” highlights identified needs, disparities and gaps in opportunity. These policy papers will serve as a resource to guide the ongoing discussion of meeting the needs of the vulnerable populations and those impacted by the Social Determinants of Health during an emergency.

There is also work being done by the Office of Climate Change Initiatives on support to vulnerable populations during extreme weather events.

5. Consulted with Senior Leadership Team who provided advice consistent with the actions taken above.

BACKGROUND HISTORY

The Legislative Authority governing emergency response in Ontario is the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act, 1990* (the Act) and the Ontario Regulation 380/04. The Act defines an ‘emergency’ as a situation or an impending situation that constitutes a danger of major proportions that could result in serious harm to persons or substantial damage to property and that is caused by the forces of nature, disease or health risk, an accident or an act whether intentional or otherwise. In Ontario, the Act also establishes the legislative framework under which municipalities respond to emergencies by delivering emergency social services.

The Act ensures that each municipality has an emergency management program in place. This includes a program coordinator, a program committee, an emergency plan, training, education and an Emergency Control Group to respond to emergencies. In the City of Hamilton, the Emergency Control Group Management Team is responsible for a

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response to an emergency. Using the Incident Management System as a chart of response, the Operations Section is responsible for ensuring response goals are met.

The Operations Section is comprised of response agencies such as the Hamilton Fire Department, Hamilton Paramedic Services, Hamilton Police Services, Public Works, Public Health etc. The Operations Section also has a branch called the Emergency Social Services Branch. If required, the Emergency Social Services Branch may activate a group called the Emergency Social Services Control Group. The Emergency Social Services Control Group is comprised of City employees who are responsible for those who have been identified as vulnerable or disproportionately impacted by social determinants of health and are further impacted by the emergency or residents who become vulnerable or disproportionately impacted by social determinants of health, as a result of the emergency. The connection of the Emergency Social Services Branch to the Emergency Social Services Control Group was not clearly identified in the Emergency Plan. Hence the Incident Management System response chart used by the Emergency Operations Centre Management Team was revised to include the connection of the Emergency Social Services Branch to the Emergency Social Services Control Group as reflected in Appendix A.

Emergency social services are defined as the provision of food, lodging, clothing, personal services and registration and identification. Emergency social services can also consist of the delivery of other specialized services such as animal care, financial assessment, culturally-specific and language services (i.e. translations) and infection and prevention control.

Although emergency social services are delivered by the Emergency Social Services Control Group, they can also be delivered through partnerships with first responders, non-governmental organizations (e.g. Red Cross, Salvation Army, The Good Shepherd Centre) and City departments such as Public Health Services and Animal Services.

There are several ways to deliver emergency social services to those affected and in need. It's important to note that there may be incidents where different points of contact are made depending on the emergency, the population impacted and the evolution of the emergency (i.e. affecting a growing number of people over a period of time). The Emergency Social Services Branch will consider the nature and scale of the incident, preparedness of households, the vulnerability of those affected, the anticipated level of displacement and proximity to community resources. For those not displaced, emergency social services may be provided through a door-to-door response particular in congregate settings. A door-to-door response may support the identification of vulnerable populations and/or those who require additional supports to sustain their safety and well-being while remaining at home. A door-to-door response was initiated in 2019 when the boiler system failed at a congregate setting leaving residents with no heat. Staff initiated door-to-door wellness checks to ensure residents had resources to sustain themselves until urgent repairs were completed.

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