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The Regional Municipality of Durham Information Report

From: Commissioner of Social Services
Report: #2025-INFO-15
Date: February 28, 2025

Subject:

Information on funding received from the one-time federal Emergency Treatment Fund.

Recommendation:

Receive for information.

Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on the successful application the Regional Municipality of Durham (Region) made to the federal government's Emergency Treatment Fund.
- 1.2 The Region will receive one-time funding in the amount of \$516,889 for the 2025-2026 fiscal year to fund an Opioid Outreach Team.

2. Background

- 2.1 In October 2024, Health Canada announced a call for proposals for the Emergency Treatment Fund (ETF) to provide urgent, targeted funding to municipalities to support rapid responses to the overdose crisis.
- 2.2 The federal budget committed \$150 million over three years to the ETF starting in the 2024-2025 fiscal year. The maximum funding allowed per recipient is \$2 million per fiscal year with projects guidelines as follows:
 - a. The priority of the ETF is to fund swift action in relation to the overdose crisis. Projects must demonstrate a response to the urgent need in their community with ready to launch programs prioritized.
 - b. Projects cannot duplicate existing services or programs or add additional resources to existing programs.

- c. Projects cannot extend beyond the fiscal year.
- 2.3 Regional staff from Social Services, Finance and Government Relations developed an application for the 2025-2026 fiscal year for \$516,889 that included the following:
- a. The creation of an Opioid Outreach Team that would join Social Services Family Services Division's complement of programs, that includes the Mental Health Outreach Program and the Primary Care Outreach Program (in partnership with the Health Department).
 - b. The team would be staffed by two registered social workers, trained at a master's level to provide a wide range of on-the-spot therapy, addressing addictions and withdrawal management issues.
 - c. The social workers would be deployed in a new fully equipped outreach vehicle.
- 2.4 The Region was notified by Health Canada on January 3, 2025, that our proposal was successful. The program was very oversubscribed with Health Canada receiving more than 300 eligible proposals and only able to fund 60 projects.

3. Previous Reports and Decisions

- 3.1 2023-INFO-46 Durham Region Opioid Response Plan Update.
- 3.2 2023-INFO-33 – Mental Health and Opioids in Durham Region includes local trends and strategies to address mental health and opioids in Durham Region.
- 3.3 2024-INFO-44 – The Opioid Crisis: A Municipal Perspective. An update on the AMO report on opioids and impacts in municipalities.
- 3.4 2024-INFO-23 – N-Desethyl etonitazene and protonitazepyne: New Nitazene Opioids Circulating in Toronto's Unregulated Opioid Supply.

4. Opioid Use in Durham Region

- 4.1 In 2024, Durham saw a 34 per cent increase in paramedic calls for opioid overdoses. This increase was driven by several factors, including the increasing prevalence of synthetic opioids like fentanyl, which are more potent than natural opioids and often mixed with other drugs, increasing the risk of overdose.
- 4.2 The number of deaths due to opioid toxicity in Durham Region has been increasing over the past nine years. In 2021, there were 129 deaths related to opioid poisoning, seven times the number in 2013. Durham saw 74 opioid toxicity deaths in 2022, and in 2023 the Region had 78 opioid toxicity deaths. The latest data available shows that from January to September 2024, the Region has counted 74 preliminary opioid toxicity deaths, indicating a significant increase from 2023.

- 4.3 In January 2025, paramedic services received 64 calls related to suspected opioid overdoses. In addition to the paramedic calls, the emergency department received 12 preliminary opioid poisoning visits.
- 4.4 Locally, the data shows that most fatal opioid toxicity events occur in private residences. Between 2018 and 2022, 74 per cent of accidental opioid-related toxicity deaths in Durham occurred in a private residence demonstrating the need for an Outreach team that will attend residences.

5. Opioid Outreach Team

- 5.1 The rapid response Opioid Outreach Team can save lives, reduce healthcare costs, and improve the overall well-being of vulnerable individuals.
- 5.2 The Opioid Outreach team will deploy clinicians (registered social workers), to meet clients experiencing opioid addiction where they are.
- 5.3 A two-person social worker team will deploy the Outreach vehicle and will travel to locations where services are needed. They will engage with clients in their homes, and support service engagement for individuals who may have been reluctant to seek services in office settings.
- 5.4 The Opioid Outreach Team will engage clients who are unsheltered or living in encampments. These historically hard to serve populations face other barriers such as transportation, mobility issues that may prevent them from accessing services in an office setting or a distant location.
- 5.5 The mobility of this team will allow for program delivery to rural areas of Durham with fewer services, further emphasizing the ability of this team to reach all people and bring services to exactly where they are needed most.
- 5.6 Program goals include effective counselling to engage in change, service engagement and navigation, substance use and overdose education, housing stabilization and supports to self-sufficiency. Outreach workers will also hand out drug testing strips and naloxone kits while educating on their use.
- 5.7 Expected outcomes include a reduction in the strain on emergency services for calls related to opioid use, increased service engagement, and a reduction in the number of overdoses.
- 5.8 The expenditures related to this application were included in the 2025 Business Plans and Budget, conditional on a successful funding application.

6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

- 6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

- a. Healthy People, Caring Communities
 - H1. Implement preventive strategies to support community health, including food security.
 - H2. Collaborate with partners to respond to complex social issues that improve community safety and well-being, including mental health and addictions.
- b. Strong Relationships
 - S5. Ensure accountable and transparent decision-making to serve community needs, while responsibly managing available resources.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 In October 2024, the federal government announced Emergency Treatment Funding to see swift action to address the opioid crisis in communities.
- 7.2 The Region submitted a successful proposal for \$516,889 to fund an Opioid Outreach Team, consisting of two clinical social workers, a vehicle, and harm reduction supplies.
- 7.3 The team will engage in effective counselling to see behaviour change, engage clients with community services and support them with navigating those services, provide substance use and overdose education, housing stabilization and supports to self-sufficiency.
- 7.4 Expected outcomes include a reduction in the strain on emergency services for calls related to opioid use, increased service engagement, and a reduction in the number of overdoses.

Respectfully submitted,

Original signed by

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Commissioner of Social Services