

DATE OF MEETING October 28, 2019

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**SUBJECT 2019 COMMUNITY ACTION INITIATIVE COMMUNITY WELLNESS
& HARM REDUCTION GRANT APPLICATION**

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide information on a Community Wellness & Harm Reduction Grant opportunity from the Province of British Columbia's Community Action Initiative and to obtain Council approval for the City's application for this grant. |

Recommendation

That Council approve the City of Nanaimo's application to the 2019 Community Action Initiative Community Wellness & Harm Reduction Grant for \$50,000 for the purpose of supporting a peer-run skills and employment program.

BACKGROUND

In September 2019, the Community Action Initiative (CAI), in partnership with the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA) and Overdose Emergency Response Centre (OERC), announced a new grant opportunity for municipalities for projects and initiatives that address the opiate crisis through harm reduction and health promotion activities.

The Community Wellness & Harm Reduction Grant is intended to support "community partnerships providing focused, action-oriented harm reduction projects or initiatives, tailored to local needs. In particular, funding is available for municipalities who propose collaborative harm reduction projects or initiatives designed to enhance the knowledge, skills and resources for individuals, families and communities to be safer, healthier and more inclusive". Examples of the types of initiatives the CAI is seeking to support are included as Attachment A. |

The proposed concept for an application by the City is for a culturally-safe, peer-run training and employment initiative. This would involve providing opportunities for People Who Use Drugs (PWUD) to obtain skills and get employment experience using best practices from similar programs run in other communities. Key to this concept is ensuring the program is culturally safe and inclusive of all peers, and, in particular, Indigenous peers who face proportionally much higher rates of vulnerability with substance use and several other barriers to employment. This concept was developed using several ideas submitted by partners of the Community Action Team (CAT). The overall purpose of the CAT is to help communities develop partnerships to provide focused, action-oriented strategies tailored to local community needs that will support addressing the overdose crisis.

The Community Wellness & Harm Reduction Grants range between \$15,000 and \$50,000, and while the primary applicant must be the municipal government (in partnership with the regional health authority), other organizations can be included on the Project Team. In the case of

Nanaimo, we would be partnering with Island Health's Mental Health and Substance Use division, under the oversight of the Director of Special Projects (Opioid Response).

At the October meeting of the CAT, members contributed their ideas on what the grant application should focus on. A full summary of their proposal is included as Attachment B. As this grant application must be made by the municipality in partnership with the regional health authority, it was agreed the City would be asked to submit an application with Island Health. If the City is successful in obtaining the grant funding, an Expression of Interest would be issued for a non-profit agency or partnership that is interested in administering the program.

DISCUSSION

In previous discussions, members of the Community Action Team have expressed the need for more initiatives that provide street-involved drug users with opportunities for positive work and social experiences. Last year, \$30,000 of the CAT's budget went towards a needle and garbage pick-up program operated by the peer-run organization New Leaf. Building on this program's impact, the CAT has allocated one-third of its 2020 budget towards similar programming.

As part of the survey on grant ideas, CAT members submitted five different concepts for potential applications, including dialogue with the community, an Indigenous liaison service for urban Indigenous peoples, peer-run education in schools, and providing community micro-grants to address the opioid crisis. Staff are recommending the concept for skill-building and employment for PWUD be pursued for three reasons: First, Nanaimo's CAT has already received funding for dialogue about the opioid crisis through the Canadian Centre for Substance Use, and the CAT plans to again offer small grants in 2020 for initiatives that respond to the opioid crisis. We are looking to use this new grant funding to create something distinct from what the CAT is already doing.

A second reason Staff support a skill-building and employment initiative is it responds to the feedback we have received from the business community and general public on the need to create positive opportunities in the lives of those who are seeking to make a change. Even at the maximum of \$50,000, this is a modest amount of funding. However, it may be enough to make a small difference for a significant number of people, some of whom may use this as a stepping-stone to improved health and stability. At the same time, a program that puts street-involved citizens in the position of making positive social contributions may also help other residents to see them in a more compassionate light, as fellow humans who are doing their best in difficult circumstances.

Thirdly, this proposed concept is consistent with the City's commitment towards reconciliation. The program would be done in a culturally-safe manner with appropriate supports and involvement of Indigenous peoples, and would facilitate greater connection between Indigenous service providers and other non-profit organizations serving the community. It is critical that any proposed program target the needs of Indigenous drug users, who are four times more likely to die of a drug overdose than non-Indigenous drug users. While all PWUD would be eligible for program participation, it is well recognized Indigenous peoples with substance use disorders face multiple barriers when entering or re-entering the workplace. Any service provider contracted for this program would be asked to ensure they develop the program in a manner that is culturally safe in collaboration with Snuneymuxw Health Department, that Indigenous

drug users are included as part of the program training team, and that Indigenous drug users are encouraged and assisted in accessing the program.

It should be noted the grant guidelines state that priority for funding will be given to cities without a Community Action Team. In July of 2018, Nanaimo's CAT received a grant of \$100,000 and has recently applied to receive \$88,000 in funding for 2019/20, so Nanaimo may not be considered a high-priority community. Nevertheless, we believe it is worthwhile to apply and are seeking Council support to do so as the application deadline is 2019-NOV-01.

OPTIONS

1. That Council approve the City of Nanaimo's application to the 2019 Community Action Initiative Community Wellness & Harm Reduction Grant for \$50,000 for the purpose of supporting a new peer-run skills and employment program.
 - Advantages: A new skills and employment program for PWUD would create positive opportunities for social connection and interaction between drug users, the business community, and the general population.
 - Disadvantages: The City may not be awarded a grant because we already have a CAT, in which case we would have spent time on the application with no reward. Administering the grant if we receive it will take some additional Staff time.
 - Financial Implications: If the application is successful, the \$50,000 would be received from the CAI and administered by the City with no additional resources required except for Staff time.

2. That Council approve the City of Nanaimo's application to the 2019 Community Action Initiative Community Wellness & Harm Reduction Grant for \$50,000 for another program that Council considers a higher priority for the City and the community.
 - Advantages: Council will be able to prioritize an area of their selection based on the input from community that they receive directly as elected officials.
 - Disadvantages: Applying for the grant for another program means there may not be support from Island Health or the CAT members for this purpose.
 - Financial Implications: If the application is successful, the \$50,000 would be received from the CAI and administered by the City with no additional resources required except for Staff time.

3. That Council not approve the City of Nanaimo's application to the 2019 Community Action Initiative Community Wellness & Harm Reduction Grant.
 - Advantages: No Staff time required.
 - Disadvantages: Would send a discouraging message to the CAT that the City is not committed to helping find solutions to the opioid crisis.
 - Financial Implications: If the City does not apply, there is no chance of getting the funding.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Community Action Initiative has announced a new grant opportunity of up to \$50,000 for municipalities for projects and initiatives that address the opiate crisis.
- The City of Nanaimo, in collaboration with Island Health, must be the applicant for this grant, but can partner with other non-profit agencies in service delivery.
- After consulting with the Community Action Team, Staff recommend applying for funding to support culturally-safe, peer-driven initiatives that provide skill-building and employment opportunities for drug users, with a focus on serving Indigenous drug users.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Community Wellness & Harm Reduction Grant – Appendix A

ATTACHMENT B: CAT List of Potential Grant Ideas

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Concurrence by:

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