

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Community Outreach and Home Visit Policy

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Human Resources

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Policy 7.32 be approved as presented in Attachment 1 to Report HR 2024-02 entitled “Community Outreach and Home Visit Safety”, effective June 12, 2024.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of this report is to present the proposed Community Outreach and Home Visit Safety Policy (Attachment 1), which outlines the commitment Oxford County is making to enhance its current occupational health and safety program to mitigate the risks associated with staff community outreach and visiting private residences.
- Provides information and guidance to ensure the personal safety of Oxford County staff who during their work duties are required to conduct work activities in the community and at private residences.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Upon approval of this policy, Human Resources will ensure that staff is aware of the new policy through established communication mechanisms.

Financial Impact

The recommendation contained in this report has no financial impact.

Communications




The Strategic Communication and Engagement team will assist Human Resources in ensuring that all staff are aware of the policy. Oxford County Connections and regularly scheduled staff meetings will be utilized as the primary means of staff communication and education.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the [2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council’s vision of “Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future.” These pillars are: (1) *Promoting community vitality*, (2) *Enhancing environmental sustainability*, and (3) *Fostering progressive government*.

The recommendation in this report supports the following strategic goals.

Strategic Plan Pillars and Goals

PILLAR 1	PILLAR 2	PILLAR 3
		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
		Goal 3.3 – Attract, retain and engage staff

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

Oxford County delivers numerous services to the public that require interactions in community settings with clientele and/or require entry into private residences. This includes service delivery by Human Services, Public Works, Community Planning, Libraries, Paramedicine and Woodingford Lodge’s Family Transition program. While most planned outreach activities and home visits are routine, non-threatening experiences, there is always a possibility that a health and safety issue could arise during a visit or outreach activity. Work activities that prove contentious (i.e. housing evictions) or that occur in remote locations (i.e. encampments) have the greatest potential for risk and must be appropriately mitigated to ensure staff safety.

Comments

Statutory Requirements for Workplace Violence Prevention

The Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) has broad requirements to ensure worker health and safety including specific provisions to address the risk of workplace violence. This includes implementing measures to prevent and mitigate physical harm to employees. Since the OHSA was originally amended to include workplace violence provisions back in 2010, Oxford County has implemented numerous measures to reduce these risks including: workplace violence prevention assessments, policies and procedures, employee de-escalation training, physical modifications to workspaces and the introduction of technology (i.e. panic button software).

Recent increases in the unsheltered population and complexities in client issues, such as mental health and addictions, presents new and broad challenges for staff providing community outreach services. The introduction of this policy and its associated guidelines is a reasonable next step to further enhance staff safety associated with the risk of workplace violence and other potential hazards. This policy does not apply to emergency services provided by the County since measures already exist for those unplanned services requiring an immediate urgent response.

The liabilities associated for employers that do not take reasonable precautions for the protection of workers can be substantial. Businesses that do not provide a safe work environment that leads to a worker being severely injured or dying on the job can face fines of up to \$1.5 million under the OHSA if convicted. Charges for other workplace parties can reach \$500,000 per offence. Additional costs associated with workers compensation claims when work-related injuries occur can also be significant with the Institute of Work & Health estimating in Ontario in 2022 that the average cost to employers for lost-time injuries ranged from \$117,000 to \$234,000 per claim depending on the sector.¹

Community Outreach Safety Policy

The proposed policy outlined in Attachment 1 demonstrates the County's continued commitment as an employer to enhance its occupational health and safety program and ensure healthy and safe workplaces. The primary objectives of the Community Outreach and Home Visit Safety Policy include:

- Raising awareness of the potential risks associated with community outreach activities and conducting home visits.
- Providing information and specific instructions to protect staff health and safety related to community outreach activities and visiting private residences as part of the County's larger workplace violence prevention program.

¹ Institute for Work & Health , Plain Language Summary - Estimating the financial return on employers' investments in the prevention of work injuries in Ontario, <https://www.iwh.on.ca/plain-language-summaries/estimating-financial-return-on-employers-investments-in-prevention-of-work-injuries-in-ontario> (Accessed January 4, 2023)

- Minimize liability and potential costs associated with community outreach and home visit services related injuries and illnesses.

CONCLUSIONS

Oxford County recognizes the importance of having a comprehensive occupational health and safety program. The inclusion of a specific policy with guidelines to address the risks associated with community outreach and conducting home visits is important to ensure Oxford County employees and volunteers are safe while delivering important County services. The proposed policy outlines Oxford County's commitment to addressing the issue of community outreach safety while minimizing the broader risks associated with workplace violence.

SIGNATURES

Report Author:

Original signed by

Greg Robertson
Senior Coordinator of Health and Safety

Departmental Approval:

Original signed by

Amy Smith
Director of Human Resources

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 – Community Outreach and Home Visit Policy, June 12, 2024