

May 13, 2020

COVID-19: Letter to Premier - psychosocial and emotional wellbeing for residents and more

Dear residents and long-term care team members,

Together we are living through a time like no other. The impact of COVID-19 has left no one untouched, and the direct impact on you – those of you living and working in LTC is far reaching. Thank you for your courage, your commitment to each other and the incredible sacrifices you're giving each day to ensure that everyone is as safe as possible. You are our inspiration.

Of key interest to OARC are two items:

- 1) Long-term care must be changed. This crisis has shone a BRIGHT light into the LTC system at all levels, has brought forth efforts to collaborate and repair what needs to be addressed, and create a NEW way for the future. We must not return to a way of living and working in LTC. The time is now, and you have my commitment that OARC will be involved in paving the way for sustainable reformation, while continuing to support the voice of residents NOW.
- 2) Psychosocial and emotional wellbeing for residents must be recognized as an essential aspect of living a full life. Residents across Ontario have been isolated from friends, family and each other for weeks, many living with virtually no human interaction each day. For LTC homes experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks, isolation and co-horting has left thousands of people at risk of longstanding consequences of isolation, loneliness and depression. OARC believes that resources and relevant interventions must be allocated NOW so that residents' emotional health is protected.

On Friday May 8, OARC sent a letter to Premier Ford and Ministers Fullerton (Minister of LTC) and Elliott (Minister of Health) seeking immediate attention and resource allocation to LTC homes to support the psychosocial and emotional wellbeing of residents.

The letter was co-signed by the following leaders/organizations:

- Ontario Long Term Care Association (OLTCA)
- AdvantAge Ontario (AO)
- Alzheimer Society of Ontario
- Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health
- CanAge
- Carola Collins, MD, CCFP, Medical Director
- Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario
- Family Councils Ontario
- George Heckman, MD, FRCP (C)
- International Longevity Centre Canada
- National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly (NICE)

The letter describes the various effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on LTC residents and how these may be negatively impacting their mental health. The letter outlines the following asks from government:

- Declare psychosocial and emotional wellbeing of residents as essential to their quality of life
- Expand the definition of 'essential visitors' to include people who contribute to the quality of life including psychosocial and emotional health
- Resources for homes to hire and train additional team members/staff whose primary role is to support psychosocial and emotional health via facilitating virtual and safe physical visiting
- Resources for homes to purchase technology and infrastructure required to support virtual visits amongst residents and families
- Creation of a safe plan for residents to enjoy social engagement outdoors in the coming weeks (physical distancing, wearing of masks, etc.), complete with human resources and supplies to make this a reality

To view the complete letter, click here:

http://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20200506LTR_PremierFordMinistersFullertonandElliotV2.pdf

Hiring Campaign launched by Ontario Government:

During the week of May 4th, through media (social, radio and print), the Ontario government launched a hiring campaign for LTC homes (ontario.ca/applyLTCjobs). The announcements call for all positions i.e. direct health care (personal care and medical care) and non-health care (cleaning, dietary, laundry). Look for this phrase:

**“Long-term care homes need your help.
Take this opportunity to help care for our most vulnerable.
Together we can make a difference and stop the spread of COVID-19.”**

Two letters from our government to LTC homes, residents and families:

1) Additional funding:

On May 7, Assistant Deputy Minister LTC Policy Division, Janet Hope, sent a letter to all LTC homes. She explained that the Ministry will be providing additional one-time emergency funding to the long-term care home (LTC) sector to support the efforts in preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19. **To read the full letter, click here:**

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20200507ADMLetterAdditionalCOVIDPreventionContainmentFunding.pdf>

Highlights include:

- Initial disbursement of \$34,838,200 for May 2020 will be flowed to homes in this way:
 - Every LTC home will receive a base allocation of \$12,000 and \$200 per bed to support costs associated with prevention and containment of COVID-19
 - Homes that are older, and therefore have greater challenges in prevention and containment of COVID-19 will receive additional funding
 - Homes with COVID-19 outbreaks reported or resolved as of April 30th will receive additional funding

2) Words of encouragement:

On May 12, Minister Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care issued a letter to Ontario’s LTC residents and families. She outlines her ongoing commitment to the protection of resident and family health and wellbeing. She details efforts taken thus far including aggressive testing, screening and surveillance measures, and ways

in which the government has sought to fight COVID-19 through management of outbreaks and spread of the disease.

Her letter expresses heartfelt recognition of the devastating impact the pandemic is having and ends with the following words of encouragement, “Every option to support our long-term care residents, staff and communities is on the table. We must do everything possible to fix our current long-term care situation and look ahead to a brighter way forward.” **To read the complete letter, click here:**

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/MOHLTC/20200512MLTCMinistersLettertoLTCResidentsandFamilies.pdf>

Thank you again to everyone who is doing their part to protect the physical and emotional health of residents, families and team members in our LTC community.

We will get through this together!

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dee Lender".

Dee Lender
Executive Director
OARC